

With Best Compliments from  
R. B. Lotwala

ARYA BHUVAN,  
SANDHURST ROAD,  
BOISBURY 4.

DIAMAT  
AS PHILOSOPHY OF NATURE



# DIAMAT

## AS PHILOSOPHY OF NATURE



116  
588  
35272

By  
P. SPRATT

With Best Compliments from  
R. B Lotwala

ARYA BHUVAN,  
SANDHURST ROAD,  
BOMBAY 4.

*Published in 1958 by*

THE LIBERTARIAN SOCIAL INSTITUTE

Arya Bhuvan, Sandhurst Road  
Bombay 4



# CONTENTS

---

INTRODUCTION	...	...	...	...	I
--------------	-----	-----	-----	-----	---

## PART I

### Chapter

I	WHAT IS MATTER?	...	...	...	4
II	MATTER AND FORM	...	...	...	9
III	THE THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE	..	...	...	12
IV	EMERGENCE	..	...	..	23
V	PURPOSE	...	...	...	33
VI	PSYCHOLOGY	...	...	..	40
VII	MYSTICISM	..	...	...	48
VIII	PARAPSYCHOLOGY	..	...	...	49
IX	MATERIALISM	..	...	...	56

## PART II

X	PARTY PHILOSOPHY	...	...	...	57
XI	ETHICS	...	..	...	66
XII	LOGIC	..	..	...	84
XIII	HISTORICAL MATERIALISM	...	...	...	92
XIV	PUTTING HEGEL ON HIS FEET	...	...	...	110
XV	HEGEL AND MARX	...	..	...	112

## INTRODUCTION

It is often said that underlying the political conflict between communism and democracy is a philosophical dispute, and many even among its opponents concede to the communist philosophy such merits that the choice is made to appear one over which a reasonable man might hesitate.

I believe that the communist philosophy does not deserve such compliments. So far as can be judged from the available expositions, it differs from traditional materialism only for the worse. Its apparent defects, however, may be due to the neglect to work it out in any thorough way. This neglect may seem strange, since it is the official philosophy of a regime which is now in its 41st year. The explanation is, no doubt, in part the ideological terror which prevails under that regime, but it is partly, I suspect, the difficulty of making sense of the system. It stands on the prestige Marx earned by his writings on other subjects, and has been allowed to pass almost unchallenged, probably because no competent philosopher has ever taken it seriously enough to waste his time refuting it. \*

It is distressing to find the undeserved prestige of this system helping to entice young men into the communist fold. Accordingly, though I can make no claim to philosophical competence, I have tried to point out, in the language current among ordinary educated men, some of its more obvious defects.

Doubtless the easiest way to refute dialectical materialism (diamat, for short) would be to subject its propositions to the modern analytical treatment. However, this would

---

\* This book was written before H. B. Acton's *The Illusion of the Epoch*, to which readers are recommended.

fail to convince most of the readers for whom this book is intended, and I venture to think that they might not be entirely wrong. Accordingly I have discussed the system in its own terms as a "philosophy of nature". Its adherents often declare that diamat is not a doctrine but a method. If it is a method, it has arrived at some conclusions, and these it affirms in the most dogmatic way and evidently regards as highly important. Manifestly it is, or contains, a philosophy of nature, an attempt to understand the world and man's place in it. According to the view which prevailed among philosophers till quite recently, to formulate a philosophy of nature was the proper business of philosophy, and despite the old-fashioned air which now surrounds such enquiries, they retain their interest for us ordinary men. The materials for such attempts must come largely from science, and we believe that, within its limitations, science merits belief. We are not convinced in advance that any attempt at a comprehensive sketch of the order of the world is vain.

But diamat, as a philosophy of nature, must stand up to the usual tests. It must conform to reason and fact. If it fails to do so, it must be amended or rejected. I believe that diamat must be rejected. It is to substantiate that belief that these chapters have been written.

I should state my own beliefs. I do not profess any theory, and do not try to establish one. The aim of my argument is entirely negative. My inclinations are towards a materialistic view of things, but I now believe that, even apart from parapsychology, materialism is not a plausible theory, and if the facts established by the parapsychologists are taken into account it is almost certainly disproved. Even when I was a communist I could make no sense of the dialectic, and never understood how it could be combined with materialism. I am still convinced that the combination is impossible.

There is some difficulty about sources. Communist philosophers sometimes complain that bourgeois philoso-

phers neglect Marx. Academic philosophers expect a modern writer's doctrine to be set forth in a reasonably comprehensive way. Marx never wrote a philosophical book. His philosophical statements are almost confined to an article in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbucher* (1844), a periodical of which only one issue appeared; *Die heilige Familie* (1844), a large book devoted principally to making fun of Bruno Bauer, which fell still-born from the press if ever book did, and was never reprinted or translated till a few years ago; *Die deutsche Ideologie* (1845-46), another large book, mainly of political or historical interest, which was not published till 80 years after it was written; and a few obiter dicta, of which the most important are the "Theses on Feuerbach" (1845), some pages of jottings which were not published till more than 40 years after they were written. In my opinion it is not certain that after these youthful exercises Marx attached any importance to diamat. If he did think it important, he treated his brain-child with an indifference which was far from characteristic of him.

Compared with Marx, the other diamats are pedestrian writers. There is, moreover, some doubt about their orthodoxy. Presumably Engels, Lenin and Stalin are safe, but diamats may repudiate Plekhanov, Labriola, Bukharin, Hecker, Haldane, and even the *Textbook of Marxist Philosophy* translated from Russian into English in the 1930s. I have however quoted these and other writers whom I believe to represent the doctrine, whether they are currently in favour or not.

I am glad to acknowledge my indebtedness to Mr. Sita Ram Goel, who suggested that such a book is needed, and to Mr. M. A. Venkata Rao and Dr. Daya Krishna, who have read the typescript and made valuable corrections and suggestions.

---

## PART I

### CHAPTER I

#### WHAT IS MATTER?

**MATERIALISM**, says Lange, is as old as philosophy. The doctrine attributed to the Charvakas is also ancient. Yet few thinkers in the West or the East have accepted materialism. Marx, however, espoused this doctrine, and his school claim that his amended version of it, "dialectical" materialism, is free from the defects of the traditional or "mechanical" materialism.

Marx chose materialism as his philosophy for two sets of reasons, philosophical and political. I shall refer to his political reasons, but they are, of course, irrelevant to the question of the truth of the doctrine. This book is concerned with diamat as a philosophy of *nature*.

The events with which we become acquainted fall into two classes: mental and material. Internal events, thinking, feeling, imagining, remembering, willing, we regard as purely mental; the events of the external world, other than those caused by men or animals, we usually regard as purely material; sensing and voluntary activity combine mental and material factors, though we usually discriminate the two sets of factors more or less clearly.

The distinction between mental and material seems clear and profound. Mental events are private, material events are public. Mental events are less definitely located in time and space than material events. Mental events have relations to the past, in memory, and to the future, in expectation and purpose, which have no close analogy in material events. Mental events usually have a centralised or organised character quite different from the apparent



character of material events. The directly known and inexpressible quality of mental events seems to have no parallel in the qualities of material events.

Materialism is a theory as to the nature and relations of these two types of events.

Engels, Marx's lifelong collaborator, wrote: "... The materialist standpoint... means that it was resolved to comprehend the real world—nature and history—just as it presents itself to everyone who approaches it free from preconceived idealistic fancies. It was decided relentlessly to sacrifice every idealistic fancy which could not be brought into harmony with the facts conceived on their own, and not in a fantastic connection. And materialism means no more than this."<sup>1</sup>

But on another page of the same book Engels says: "The one party, which placed the origin of the spirit before that of nature, and therefore in the last instance accepted creation in some form or other .... made the camp of idealism. The others, who recognised nature as the source, belong to the various schools of materialism .... Idealism and materialism, originally not used in any other sense, are not here employed in any other sense."<sup>2</sup>

Engels thus gives two definitions of materialism, which *prima facie* differ considerably. The former amounts to an assertion that unsophisticated men regard the world as material, a resolve to adopt that attitude, and a condemnation of the alternative, "idealistic", view as fantastic and preconceived. "Preconceived" seems inappropriate if men originally regard the world as material, and change their opinion later; and equally inappropriate if he means by preconceived that they persist in their belief despite discouragement, since he announces his intention

<sup>1</sup> Engels: *Ludwig Feuerbach* (Moscow, 1916), p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> Engels: *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

to persist in his opposite belief. He also forgets that the world as it appears to those who approach it free from preconceptions contains mental, *i.e.*, *prima facie* non-material, events, which the materialist philosopher does not take at their face value but proceeds to explain as really material events. Traditional philosophy has not been content to take things at their face value: it has been concerned to find the "reality" behind the "appearance".

When he wrote this, Engels may have echoed a passage in Marx's *German Ideology*: "... we do not set out from what men say, fancy, represent to themselves, nor yet from man as said to be, thought to be, fancied to be, represented to be, in order thence and by that path to reach man in the flesh: we set out from real, active human beings, and from their actual vital processes we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this vital process. Even the phantasmagorias in the human brain are necessary supplements of man's material vital process. . Consciousness does not determine life, but life determines consciousness." It is of course sound to set out from real human beings, but Marx begs the philosophical question in the same way, by assuming that real human beings are material and that any other characteristics they may have are "supplements". Engels draws the conclusion in the second passage quoted from him.

This second definition states a doctrine, *viz.*, that matter or nature is the source of, or is prior to, mind or spirit. This is materialism; the opposite view is "idealism". However, he prejudices the case for idealism by asserting that "in the last instance" it accepts creation; whereas it is possible to conceive of matter as derivative from spirit in other ways than by creation. Leibniz, for example, regards matter as consisting of spirits. Moreover, Engels implies that only two views on these questions are possible, whereas men have held many other doctrines. The Sankhya theory, and Plato, regard matter as co-eternal with spirit, and not derived from it. However, Engels's statement of the materialist doctrine, *viz.*, that matter is the

source of, or is prior to, mind or spirit, conveys the generally accepted meaning of materialism.

But the definition of materialism is incomplete unless we know what is meant by mind or spirit and by matter. Mind causes no difficulty, since we are minds, and so know the nature and quality of mind better than any definition could tell us. Matter, which we know only indirectly, is however controversial.

Many critics of materialism argue that materialism collapses because in the view of modern physics matter is not a substance but consists of events related by laws. I do not think that this objection meets the contention of materialism, unless it is agreed, as argued in the next chapter, that the fact that matter obeys laws renders it, so far, non-material. Even though he no longer believes in a material substance, the materialist can be content if the events which have taken the place of material substance are material in their nature.

What then is the meaning of "material in their nature"? All the materialist is concerned about is that these events should be not mental. Materialism means that the universe is primarily non-mental, and that mentality is a secondary or derivative characteristic which only certain types of material events possess.

The materialist assumes that what we know as inorganic matter is non-mental. This however is open to question from various points of view; or it may be regarded as a question of degree. How much of the quality of mentality can matter possess and still be considered matter? Clearly, if all material events had the characteristics which Spinoza attributes to them, *viz.*, extension and thought, we should not say that materialism is true.

The trouble is that, unlike mind, we do not know matter directly: we assume or postulate or infer its nature. Or if it is argued that we know directly the matter of which

our bodies are composed, then that matter has characteristics which we class as mental, as well as some which we class as material : it has weight and size and resistance, but also pleasure and pain and colour and will and thought.

Engels seems, in his first definition of materialism quoted above, to try to get away from this difficulty : "It was resolved to comprehend the real world . . . just as it presents itself to everyone who approaches it free from preconceived idealistic fancies . . . facts conceived on their own and not in a fantastic connection." But it is elementary that we never get facts on their own : all our facts of observation are interpreted, our perception is always apperception. We see the material world as coloured : is colour part of matter or is it contributed by us ; is it material or mental ? We see material objects as members of classes and subject to natural law : are these classes and laws material or mental ? To us prosaic persons a primrose by the river's brim is a yellow primrose and nothing more : to Wordsworth it was something more. Who is right ?

Thus the essential propositions of materialism are that inorganic matter is non-mental, and that mentality derives from it. Let us see the difficulties of this doctrine and how diamat tries to overcome them.

---

## CHAPTER II

### M A T T E R   A N D   F O R M

ENGELS says that in the Middle Ages the controversy between materialism and idealism was carried on under the guise of the dispute between nominalism and realism. Nominalism holds that nouns, verbs, adjectives, prepositions, etc., which stand for a common character or relation having particular instances, are merely names; realism holds that such words refer to an entity, a universal, which has real being, like the being of Plato's Ideas in heaven.

It is usually assumed that the nominalists had the better of it, and diamats make fun of realism, quoting Heine's joke about The Kick in the Pants, the heavenly archetype of all earthly kicks in the pants. However, the dispute is not settled so easily: even a writer so strongly inclined to nominalism as Russell (in his later years) admits a final reservation: "I conclude, therefore, though with hesitation, that there are universals, and not merely general words. Similarity, at least, will have to be admitted; and in that case it seems hardly worth while to adopt elaborate devices for the exclusion of other universals."<sup>1</sup>

The Greek philosophers resolved the world not into matter and mind but into matter and form, or substance and form. Form is not only geometrical shape: it includes the laws which things obey, their behaviour-patterns. It consists of universals: that is, it is of a nature to be grasped by reason, it partakes of the nature of mind. Substance without form, that is pure matter without any mental element, would be a chaos, in which nothing would be recognisable as belonging to a natural kind, and no behaviour would be predictable.

Materialists always take for granted that the matter

---

<sup>1</sup> Russell: *An Enquiry into Meaning and Truth*, ch. xxv.

which they discuss embodies the elements of form, that is of law or the uniformity of nature. They assume that in the purely material world matter falls into natural kinds—the electromagnetic radiations, the chemical elements, etc.—and these obey the laws which science discovers. But this assumption has a disconcerting implication.

A chemical element is believed to be a class of atoms, all of which are closely similar and distinctly different from the atoms of all the other elements. The atoms of an element are thus a natural kind. The occurrence of this limited number (90-odd) of natural kinds, the chemical elements, is explained by the assumption that the atoms are combinations of the fundamental particles, protons, neutrons, electrons, etc., which can combine only in a limited number of ways. All protons are alike, all neutrons are alike, and so on: they are natural kinds. Some day the occurrence of these natural kinds may be explained in an analogous way by reference to some other natural kinds. This analysis can hardly go on indefinitely: it must come to a stop somewhere. In that case matter resolves, presumably, into a single ultimate natural kind. But if it is ultimate, the similarity of its members is not due to the similarity of their constitution or of any physical process; it must therefore be due either to chance or to some non-physical principle of uniformity.

In somewhat more general terms: physics has arrived at certain fundamental constants—Planck's constant, the gravitational constant, the mass and charge of the electron, the velocity of light, etc. Some of these may yet be explained in terms of the others or of yet unknown constants, but some such constants must always remain at the basis of physical theory. It will thus be an ultimate, unexplained fact that these constants are constant, *i.e.*, that they are always and everywhere the same. But since they are ultimate, it cannot be a physical uniformity which explains their constancy. The uniformity of physical nature (if it is not a matter of chance, which is incredible) must have some non-physical ground.

It is natural to think of this non-physical ground as of the character of universals, *i.e.*, as having a rational or mental nature. In fact we have no other suggestion to make as to its character. It follows then that by taking for granted the uniformity of nature and the reign of natural law, the materialists are overlooking an element of reason or mind in nature. We have *no* evidence of the existence of pure matter, *i.e.*, matter without "form". All the matter that we know belongs to natural kinds and is subject to law. That is, all matter is informed by reason. It is therefore a mistake to assert that matter is prior to mind.

A similar argument is derived from the aesthetic character of many natural phenomena. We commonly ascribe aesthetic value to some, though not all, natural objects—the celestial scenery, clouds, rainbows, landscapes, crystal forms, trees, flowers, animals. But aesthetic values belong to the mental realm. Materialism would therefore compel us to deny our native impulse and to suppose that we project their beauty on to these things. This doctrine, that natural beauty resides in the mind of the human observer, is somewhat opposed in spirit to the extreme epistemological realism upheld by *diamat*, though it may be reconcilable with it. But it is rather hard to believe. For many people the existence of natural beauty is a persuasive argument for the existence of a non-material element in nature.

---

### CHAPTER III

## THE THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

WE experience mental events directly, and our knowledge of some of their characteristics is certain; whereas our knowledge of material events is indirect, and our knowledge of all their characteristics is doubtful. This is not a conclusive argument, but it has some force against the materialist view that matter is primary and mind derivative.

It is not conclusive, for if it were true that matter is primary and mind derivative, and if mind and matter behaved as they do (which we do not know to be impossible), then our knowledge of mind would be direct and of matter indirect. But it is an argument of some cogency, for though we know that inorganic matter exists, and we have some, but not conclusive, reasons to think that mind is derived from or dependent on it, our lack of direct knowledge of inorganic matter deprives us of certainty that it is non-mental, *i.e.*, that it is matter in the sense required to make materialism a true theory.

Lenin, though he devotes a large part of his big book, *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, to this argument, will not admit its cogency, nor will he answer it. His only stated objection to it is that it leads to solipsism, and solipsism is nonsense. That is true, but it is here that the philosophical interest arises: we have an argument which starts from what seem to be true assumptions but ends in a false conclusion. Where does the error enter? If Lenin had been interested in philosophy he would have tried to find out where the error takes place, and what is the truth of the whole matter. But he was not interested in philosophy: his premisses are quotations from Marx and Engels, and he was only interested to show that his party opponents had departed from Marxian orthodoxy. Consequently



*Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, that monument of erudition, or at least of hard work, is sheer waste of labour.

However, some diamats have attempted to answer this argument. They say that together with the whole subject of epistemology whose assumptions it shares, the argument is false because it is individualistic and abstract. Bukharin condemns epistemology as "individualistic, anti-historical and quietist".<sup>1</sup> The charge of quietism refers to its social consequences, which have no bearing on its truth. The accusation that it is individualistic and anti-historical assumes what has to be proved: it assumes that we already know the existence of other people and of the external world. Of course we do know these things; but the purpose of the epistemological inquiry is to judge of the validity of that knowledge and to draw any possible inferences as to its limitations. Such an inquiry must be individualistic, since knowledge occurs only in individuals' minds; and must abstract from knowledge about the world, since to assume our knowledge about the world would be to argue in a circle.

There are, in fact, two kinds or departments of epistemology. The one is this inquiry into the validity of knowledge, which must be logically prior to knowledge; the other is the scientific inquiry into the physics, physiology and psychology of knowledge and the historical inquiry into its growth among men. The former is the business of philosophy, but the diamats denounce it as bourgeois and solipsistic, and confine their attention to the second.

The diamats' dislike of the inquiry into the validity of knowledge is political: they fear that it tends to "quietism", i.e., it lowers people's revolutionary enthusiasm. Whether this fear is realistic need not concern us, since it is irrelevant to philosophy. Their dislike of epistemology is also due, however, to Hegel, whose conclusions they take over without justification.

---

<sup>1</sup> N. Bukharin in *Science at the Crossroads*.

Hegel has a doctrine, somewhat reminiscent of Maya, concerning error. The Absolute Idea is eternally itself, yet it creates out of itself an antithesis in the form of illusion, which is real but incomplete, contingent and temporal. It then proceeds to dispel illusion, and from the clash between Idea, thesis, and Error, antithesis, Truth emerges as the synthesis. Thus truth depends upon the existence of error.

Hegel also makes the organism go through a similar process. The organism puts itself forth against itself in the form of the external world. Then the external world is both identical with, internal to, the organism, and diverse from, external to, the organism.

Cognition consists in rendering what is external internal, and this may occur either through a passive reception by the subject, which is cognition proper, or through an active transformation of the object into conformity with the subject, which is volition. Cognition proper is finite, a function of the understanding (*Verstand*), *i.e.*, it is confined within the limitations of ordinary thought: it has not forsaken the categories of logic and comprehended the identity of opposites. Cognition assumes the object as given, *i.e.*, arbitrary, and therefore lacks necessity. It has two methods, analytic or deductive, and synthetic or inductive. Philosophical cognition or dialectic, on the other hand, is a function of reason (*Vernunft*), which is superior to understanding. Reason is both analytic and synthetic: it does not assume any arbitrary given, and is therefore absolute and necessary. It denies any unknowable. For reason, being and knowing are identical, though different, for the object is thought. The Hegelian system claims absolute truth, but does not deny the truth of other systems, since they are stages through which the Truth has evolved.

It is evident that the diamat theory of knowledge is derived from Hegel. Engels, repeated by Lenin, says: "What is human thought? Is it the thought of a single man? No. But it exists only in the individual thoughts of millions of past, present and future men . . . the sove-

reignty of thought realises itself in a series of men whose thought is extremely unsovereign; knowledge, which has an unconditional claim to truth, in a series of relative errors; neither the one nor the other can be completely realised except through an endless extension of the existence of mankind."<sup>2</sup> This passage reproduces Hegel's doctrine of truth emerging from error, and his denial of a limit to knowledge. Diamat admits no ultimate obstacle to knowledge: Engels says that knowledge approaches truth asymptotically. One of the diamat's reasons for this confidence, analogous to Hegel's identity of being and knowing, and the organism creating the world out of itself, is that the mind is part of nature and so is not precluded from understanding it: "..... thought and consciousness .... products of the human brain, being in the last instance also products of nature, do not contradict the rest of nature's connections but are in correspondence with them."<sup>3</sup> Diamats also use the formula of the unity of being and knowing or thinking.

Diamat claims that the dialectic is a superior method of knowing, superior because it recognises the principle, veiled to ordinary thought, of the identity of opposites. This echoes the Hegelian doctrine of *Verstand* and *Vernunft*. Diamat also follows Hegel in claiming to supersede and take up into itself the truth of earlier systems.

Diamat also effects a synthesis of Hegel's cognition and volition. It denies that the process of knowledge is passive. Knowledge involves acquiring a mental picture of the world, but this is achieved by active work upon the world, in the course of which both world and subject are changed. "The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. In practice man must prove the truth, i.e., the reality and power, the this-sidedness, of his thinking. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of

<sup>2</sup> Engels: *Anti-Duhring*, I, IX.

<sup>3</sup> Engels: *Ibid.*, I, III.

thinking which is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question." <sup>4</sup>

Russell <sup>5</sup> has interpreted this as an anticipation of Dewey's instrumentalism, which holds that the mind in knowing is not passive but selects from and projects upon the relatively formless flux of sense-experience and thus in some degree creates the world it perceives. Marx may have anticipated Dewey, but the diamat school has taken a quite different view, and the Theses on Feuerbach as a whole do not, I think, bear this interpretation. Russell's suggestion is plausible only if the passage is read with the idea in mind of the knower as an individual. The rest of the Theses however suggest that Marx, as usual, was thinking not of the individual as knower but of the human race. Then the "practical", "active", "revolutionary" side of knowing is not a mental activity of the knowing mind but a physical activity of the race. Engels explains at length that men know the world not through contemplating it but by eating, digging, building, breeding new species, etc., and thus changing the world in the everyday sense. Thus the term knowledge in diamat usually means human knowledge, attributed to the race, not to the individual knower. "All schools but dialectical materialism start from the assumption that 'I have been given only my own sensations'." <sup>6</sup>

Thus diamat derives from Hegel its confidence in knowledge, and its manner of treating knowledge as a public, not an individual matter. Both are politically convenient: the confidence in knowledge fits a doctrine of progress, and the public character of knowledge fits a doctrine of socialism; but these are no proof of philosophical truth. Both these habits tend to obscure the meaning and importance of the theory of knowledge, in the sense of an inquiry into the validity of the knowing process. "Dialectic, as understood by Marx, and in accordance with

<sup>4</sup> Marx: Theses on Feuerbach, II.

<sup>5</sup> Russell: *Freedom and Organisation*, p. 221.

<sup>6</sup> N. Bukharin in *Science at the Crossroads*.

Hegel, includes what is now called the theory of knowledge, or epistemology, which . . . must regard its subject-matter historically, studying and generalising the origin and development of knowledge."<sup>7</sup> Thus in the diamat view, the study of its historical development (and physiological character) is enough: there is no prior problem of the validity of this inquiry. As Lenin said, this is Hegelianism.

Diamat claims to have freed Hegel's dialectic from the errors due to his idealism. But these doctrines, the sovereignty of thought, the dialectic as a superior mode of understanding, the identity of being and knowing, the emergence of truth from error, and knowledge and practice as a single process approaching truth asymptotically, are all plausible only in a context of idealistic monism. In a materialistic system there is no more reason why the human intellect should be sovereign than the dog's or the ant's intellect: dogs and ants are part of nature, too. The dialectic is an infallible guide only if it embodies the self-movement of the idea: otherwise it is just as likely to lead to error as to truth. In materialism there can be no inevitability about the emergence of truth from the errors of men whose "thought is extremely unsovereign". In the same way there is no foreordained progress towards truth through eating, digging and building.

The difficulty of reconciling this dialectical optimism with a materialistic doctrine of knowledge is suggested by a passage already quoted from Marx: "We set out from real, active human beings, and from their actual vital processes we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this vital process . . . Morality, religion, metaphysics, and ideology in general, with their appropriate forms of consciousness, thus forfeit the semblance of independence . . . Consciousness does not determine life, but life determines consciousness."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Lenin: "Karl Marx" (encyclopaedia article).

<sup>8</sup> Marx: *German Ideology*.

This very argument, that in materialism physiological processes determine thought, has been used by McTaggart to disprove materialism. These processes proceed according to the laws of physiology, not of logic, and accordingly are not likely to give truth. If, then, our ideas are physiological processes, those ideas will be unreliable, and in particular the doctrine of materialism will be unreliable. Hence materialism is self-contradictory. There may be a convincing answer to this argument, but Marx apparently did not think so: he thought that ideas "forfeit all semblance of independence". But if ideas have no independence, the only way in which they can arrive at ultimate truth is through a *cosmic* evolution, like that of Hegel's Idea, which is foreordained to reach the right goal. This conception is of course incompatible with materialism, but it is implicit throughout the diamat system.

Diamats are particularly anxious to combat scepticism. "The most telling refutation of this, as of all other philosophical crotchets, is practice, *viz.*, experiment and industry. If we can prove the correctness of our idea of a natural process by making it ourselves, bringing it into being from its conditions, and making it serve our own purposes into the bargain, then there is an end of the Kantian incomprehensible thing-in-itself." <sup>9</sup>

It is true that the only way to acquire knowledge of nature is by observation and the formation and testing of hypotheses. But it is not obvious that there is no limit to the knowledge so attained, as Engels asserts in this passage. In fact we have some reason to think that there may be such limits. Physicists emphasise the formal, structural and mathematical character of their knowledge, and deny any knowledge of the intrinsic nature of the entities they deal with. This is very similar to Kant's doctrine of an unknowable thing-in-itself. Engels's illustrations only confirm this criticism. "The chemical substances produc-

<sup>9</sup> Engels: *Feuerbach*, II.

ed in the bodies of plants and animals remained such 'things-in-themselves' until organic chemistry began to produce them . . . . For 300 years the Copernican solar system was a hypothesis . . . . but when Leverrier, by means of the data provided by this system, not only deduced the necessity of the existence of an unknown planet, but also calculated the position in the heavens which this planet must occupy, and when Galle really found this planet, the Copernican system was proved."<sup>10</sup>

To synthesise a substance one must know its chemical structure, schematically at least, but that is not what Kant meant by the thing-in-itself, nor what physicists mean when they say that the intrinsic nature of the objects they deal with remains unknown. This is still unrevealed even if we know the way in which the parts of a structure are related to each other. Leverrier's study of the anomalies in the orbit of Uranus led to the discovery of Neptune, and this was taken as confirming Copernicus' heliocentric doctrine. But Einstein's study of the anomalies in the orbit of Mercury led to the triumph of a theory according to which, in a certain sense, the heliocentric and the geocentric theories are equally arbitrary.

The sceptical argument from epistemology is familiar. It asks us to look at an ordinary material object, at different distances, from different angles, in different lights, with the naked eye, in mirrors, through microscopes, and so on. All these give different impressions: is any one of them the truth? If not, what is the truth about the object? Recall the old puzzle about the status of the "secondary" qualities: is the colour in the object, or is it contributed by the observer? There is no agreed answer to this, and though we feel more certain about the primary qualities, motion, mass, number, size, shape, hardness, there is room for doubt even here. Or consider the object as described by physical theory. It consists of a very large number of elec-

<sup>10</sup> Engels: *Ibid.*, II.

trically charged particles or wave groups in certain patterns and energy levels and states of motion. Is this the true object? It is not easy to reconcile all these impressions and conceptual models. Yet they all enable us to deal practically with the object for various purposes. Practical effectiveness is therefore no certain criterion of truth. Indeed it should need no proof that practical effectiveness and truth are often far apart. Men threw stones accurately long before they understood ballistics, and satisfied their hunger before they understood the biochemistry of digestion.

It is risky to draw philosophical conclusions from ordinary perception and practice. This judgment is reinforced if we consider the physical and physiological mechanism of perception. Seeing, hearing, etc., are roundabout processes, which take time, give results which are private to the observer and in principle incomparable with those of other observers, and worst of all, completely baffle understanding. Science has made no progress towards explaining how processes in the nervous system and the brain cause sensations of colour, sound, temperature, smell, and so on. It is true that we have obtained our knowledge of the physics and physiology of perception from perception, but our realisation how precarious the process is should make us all the more doubtful of the conclusions it yields.

Scepticism finds further support when we recall such phenomena as *errors of perception*, the *illusions of the psychological laboratory*, and the well-known power of the mind to make the observer ignore things which are before him and "see" things which are not there, to create dreams and waking hallucinations, and to cause, by suggestion, etc., similar aberrations in other minds.

Einstein in 1905 discovered an instance of the *illusion-creating habit of the mind*. Up to that time the assumption of absolute space was generally accepted. Once he had pointed out that no fact of observation makes the assumption necessary, and accordingly it can be discarded, he was free to make the great advance of the Special Theory of



Relativity.<sup>11</sup> Heisenberg made use of a similar argument when he dispensed with the assumption that material particles, motion and space within the atom are similar to those in the space of observation, and decided to discuss only observed quantities and their relations, without reference to an atom model. Both arguments tend to confirm the positivistic or agnostic or sceptical view, as opposed to the realistic theory that science is building up a picture of the real world.

The diamat formula is that of Lenin: that in perception the mind "mirrors" or "pictures" reality, a view which is undoubtedly too realistic, and, one would have thought, too mechanistic. The pictures of the world given by ordinary observation and by the sciences are aptly described by the Hegelian formula: real, but incomplete, contingent and temporal. The diamats assume that since Hegel had a way of dispelling illusion and arriving at Truth, therefore their doctrine can do the same, but without the Hegelian cosmology. But Hegel's cosmology is essential, and the diamats assume it without realising it. Diamat is Hegelian "idealism".

The physical world is objective: scarcely anybody has seriously denied it, though from diamat writings one would suppose that nearly all "bourgeois" philosophers do so. Our knowledge about the world is social and cumulative, and is by now very extensive. But it is indirect: it is knowledge by description, not by acquaintance. The argu-

---

<sup>11</sup> Engels says (*Anti-Dühring*, V.): "Just because time is different from change .... it is possible to measure it by change .... time in which no recognizable changes occur is very far removed from not being time; rather it is pure time .... if we want to grasp the idea of time in all its purity .... we are compelled to put aside all the various events which occur in time, and in this way to form the idea of a time in which nothing happens." Doubtless because of this passage, the doctrine of absolute space and time is orthodox with the diamat school. In Russia relativity was for many years denounced on philosophical grounds. It appears, however, that it is no longer banned in the physics departments.

ment from epistemology shows that our knowledge of the physical world is subject to a good deal of uncertainty. It is to an unknown extent contributed by the observer. Even in the most highly developed sciences knowledge is formal or structural: it is knowledge of relations among entities (which is all that is needed for technology), and tells us therefore less than we are apt to suppose about the nature of the entities so related.

Thus we do not know that there is such a thing as matter, in the sense required by materialism: what we take to be matter may be the thinking and extended substance of Spinoza, or the monads of Leibniz, or what not? On the other hand we have direct, certain knowledge of ourselves, and some maintain that we have direct, certain knowledge also of each other. In either case this knowledge is of mental entities. It is therefore unduly dogmatic to make the philosophical judgment that the world is primarily material in character and that its mental part or aspect is derivative.

---

## CHAPTER IV

### EMERGENCE

IN a physical system, if the situation at one time can be specified, with the completeness required for the application of the laws of physics, in terms of certain dimensions or variables, each raised to a certain power, the system at any other time will be specifiable in terms of the same powers of the same variables. This principle is used in physics, and is believed to be of wide application.

If materialism is true, the principle cannot be extended beyond the inorganic world. A system, namely the earth, which at one time was fully specifiable in terms of physical variables, length, time, mass, electric charge, at later times required for a full account of its causal behaviour a number of additional variables, *viz.*, those needed to specify conscious awareness, the sense qualities, emotion, reasoning, volition, etc. Before the rise of living organisms on the earth, the physical variables sufficed; since the occurrence of life, some or all of these other variables have been necessary. The development from the simpler system to the system needing more variables to specify it is called emergence.

*Prima facie* the change which we all experience daily from dreamless sleep to waking consciousness is an instance of emergence. However, it may be argued that even in dreamless sleep what may be called the mental variables do not entirely disappear, or that their "potentiality" remains. *Prima facie* the development of a fertilised ovum into a conscious human is an instance of emergence, but it may be argued that the ovum is only part of a system, of which its mother is the other part, so that no new variables are required. But if the normal view of biological evolution is accepted, it is an instance of emergence. If living and thinking organisms evolve from matter which can be fully described in terms of the physical variables, then emergence is a fact.

Most people who have thought about it appear to have believed that emergence is impossible. Some say that the "lower" cannot explain the "higher". More convincingly, the objection may be put thus. Consider a machine working entirely on mechanical principles, i.e., with wheels, levers, weights, springs, etc. Machines of this type can be constructed to perform highly complex operations, but no such machine can be made to think, or to develop purposes other than those of the designer and the operator. This remains true also if the mechanisms include chemical, optical, and electrical processes. Chemical reagents do not taste or smell, cameras do not see, electronic calculators do not become conscious. The principle of dimensions applies: if when the constituent parts of the machine are separate the system is specifiable in terms of certain powers of certain variables, it will still be describable in terms of the same powers of the same variables when the parts have been put together to form the machine. We feel quite sure that it will not develop qualities or modes of behaviour which require variables other than the physical variables. I need quote only one thinker who agrees, J. B. S. Haldane: ".... if the real world consisted of such self-existent particles (as those assumed by the Newtonians) there would be no room in it for mind .... It is very difficult to see how mind could either perceive a world like that or act upon it."<sup>1</sup>

The physical parts of which animal and human bodies are composed have mechanical, chemical, electrical and optical properties, and when separate have no other properties that we know of. Yet when they are combined in this particular way, the organism which results has properties which need for their full description many more variables, namely those needed to deal with the deliverance of the senses, pleasure and pain, emotion, thought, volition, etc.

The opponents of emergence then argue either that

---

<sup>1</sup> Haldane: *The Marxist Philosophy and the Sciences*, pp. 147-48.

during the formation of the organism extra unseen factors are added, *i.e.*, they adopt a dualistic theory, or that the constituent parts of the organism are not fully specified by the variables of physics but have the other properties of developed organisms, though they fail to reveal them to us except when combined in the ways necessary to produce organisms. The opponents of emergence include some of the famous names of modern philosophy. Descartes chose the former alternative, psycho-physical dualism. The latter alternative was the opinion of Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, and Whitehead. Russell's neutral monism is a version of the second doctrine. It is interesting that Haeckel, commonly (though wrongly, as Lenin points out) regarded as a somewhat crude materialist, held the second alternative: "Liking and disliking, desire and aversion, must be common to all atoms, which can only be explained by ascribing to them perception and volition." John Wisdom, before he took up analysis, discussed emergence and felt the same difficulty as these other writers. He stated his objection to it in propositions which he called the principle of the genetic resemblance of cause and effect: If one situation A forms the complete explanation of another B, then every supremely genetic variable manifested in B must also be manifested in A; and if one situation B is the complete effect of a situation A, then every supremely genetic variable manifested in A must also be manifested in B.<sup>2</sup> When he wrote them (1934) he thought these propositions true, and they deny emergence.

Even those philosophers who claim to believe in emergence do not all do so. Lloyd Morgan, usually described as the leading exponent of the doctrine of emergent evolution, holds the opinion of Spinoza, that matter has both extension and thought. That is, he repudiates emergence. L. T. Hobhouse, another prominent member of the school, makes statements which amount to dualism: *i.e.*, he also repudiates emergence.

---

<sup>2</sup> Wisdom: *Problems of Mind and Matter*, pp. 93-94.

The diamat school believe in emergence, but do nothing to make it plausible. Engels says: "... if the further question is raised what thought and consciousness really are and where they come from, it becomes apparent that they are products of the human brain and that man himself is a product of nature."<sup>3</sup> Lenin says: "Materialism .... takes matter as primary and regards consciousness, thought and sensation as secondary, because in its well-defined form sensation is associated only with the higher forms of matter (organic matter), while 'in the foundation of the structure of matter' one can only surmise the existence of a faculty akin to sensation. Such, for example, is the supposition of Haeckel, Lloyd Morgan and others .... there still remains to be investigated how matter apparently entirely devoid of sensation is related to matter which though composed of the same atoms (or electrons), is yet 'endowed with a well-defined faculty of sensation. Materialism clearly formulates the as yet unsolved problem and thereby stimulates the attempt to solve it.'"<sup>4</sup> "Sensation, thought, consciousness, are the supreme product of matter organised in a particular way."<sup>5</sup>

There are a number of similar statements in Engels and Lenin, but none add anything to these. It is strange that they should have so neglected the problem, for it is the crucial problem of materialism. Lenin says it is a matter for research, showing that he does not recognise its peculiar character. Research may reveal how a chemical reaction produces an electrical potential, or how a particle is transformed into a photon; it is a problem of a quite different type to discover how an electric current is transformed into a sensation of colour or an act of will.

Diamat claims to make three related contributions to the solution of this problem. One is the doctrine of leaps

<sup>3</sup> Engels: *Anti-Dühring*, I, III.

<sup>4</sup> Lenin: *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, I, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Lenin: *Ibid.*, I, 2.

or crises. "In spite of all gradualness, the transition from one form of motion to another always remains a leap, a decisive change. This is true of the transition from the mechanics of celestial bodies to that of smaller masses on a particular celestial body; it is equally true of the transition from the mechanics of masses to the mechanics of molecules—including the forms of motion investigated in physics proper: heat, light, electricity, magnetism. In the same way, the transition from the physics of molecules to the physics of atoms—chemistry—in turn involves a decided leap; and this is even more clearly the case in the transition from ordinary chemical action to the chemism of albumen which we call life. Then within the sphere of life the leaps become ever more infrequent and imperceptible."<sup>6</sup> This doctrine is avowedly taken from "the Hegelian nodal line of measure relations".

To apply a new word to a fact is not to explain it. "Leap" is merely a new word. But it has further implications. There are in nature what can be called leaps or sudden changes: critical values, breaking-points, thresholds. There are different classes of phenomena, which are conventionally grouped as electrical, optical, physical, chemical, biological, psychological, and so on. The implication of the doctrine of leaps is that the distinction pointed out above, between the physical and chemical on the one hand and the biological and psychological on the other, is of the same nature as the distinction between the physical and the chemical or that between the electrical and the optical: they are all leaps.

On materialist assumptions it is impossible to regard these distinctions as leaps of the same type. That is possible only on dualistic or mentalistic assumptions. The behaviour of the inorganic world can be dealt with by the small number of variables or dimensions used in physics, and the laws necessary are of the mechanistic, causal or

---

<sup>6</sup> Engels: *Anti-Dühring*, I, VIII.

The diamat school believe in emergence, but do nothing to make it plausible. Engels says: "... if the further question is raised what thought and consciousness really are and where they come from, it becomes apparent that they are products of the human brain and that man himself is a product of nature."<sup>3</sup> Lenin says: "Materialism .... takes matter as primary and regards consciousness, thought and sensation as secondary, because in its well-defined form sensation is associated only with the higher forms of matter (organic matter), while 'in the foundation of the structure of matter' one can only surmise the existence of a faculty akin to sensation. Such, for example, is the supposition of Haeckel, Lloyd Morgan and others .... there still remains to be investigated how matter apparently entirely devoid of sensation is related to matter which though composed of the same atoms (or electrons), is yet endowed with a well-defined faculty of sensation. Materialism clearly formulates the as yet unsolved problem and thereby stimulates the attempt to solve it."<sup>4</sup> "Sensation, thought, consciousness, are the supreme product of matter organised in a particular way."<sup>5</sup>

There are a number of similar statements in Engels and Lenin, but none add anything to these. It is strange that they should have so neglected the problem, for it is the crucial problem of materialism. Lenin says it is a matter for research, showing that he does not recognise its peculiar character. Research may reveal how a chemical reaction produces an electrical potential, or how a particle is transformed into a photon; it is a problem of a quite different type to discover how an electric current is transformed into a sensation of colour or an act of will.

Diamat claims to make three related contributions to the solution of this problem. One is the doctrine of leaps

<sup>3</sup> Engels: *Anti-Duhring*, I, III.

<sup>4</sup> Lenin: *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, I, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Lenin: *Ibid.*, I, 2.



number of atoms is organised in a mouse or a man .... If the world consisted of such self-existent particles (as the Newtonians assume) there would be no room in it for mind ..... my own view is that it is just through the contradictions in the crude view of nature that we can see, if only in the dimmest way as yet, how it has been possible for life, and later for mind, to arise."<sup>8</sup> However, he is probably referring to the physical properties of mind.

Thus far the doctrine of leaps or crises as a solution for the problem of emergence. Another such solution is provided by the formula of the unity of opposites. Haldane says: ".... in the chemistry of proteins, the physical basis of life, the union of opposites is a condition for the emergence of novelty."<sup>9</sup> The opposites he refers to are acid and basic groups, which both occur in amino-acids, "a beautiful example of the union of opposites," which can combine to produce proteins.

In what sense are acids and bases opposites? It would be equally apt to call them complementaries. It is because the diamats have their eyes fixed on the class struggle that they favour the word opposite. In most of their chemical functions acids and bases are complementary. The special kind of combination of acid and basic groups which constitute an amino-acid is important not even because of the complementary functions of these groups, but because it permits of the formation of long chains, which however, unlike the simple hydrocarbon chains, also contain nitrogen atoms. It is hard to see what significance opposition has here. No ground whatever is given for attributing to this opposition any creative function.

Another case is evolution as the outcome of the "dialectical opposition" between mutation and selection.<sup>10</sup> The

---

<sup>8</sup> Haldane: *The Marxist Philosophy and the Sciences*, pp. 146-48.

<sup>9</sup> Haldane: *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>10</sup> Haldane: *Ibid.*, p. 118.

differential type. In fact it is unnecessary to assume, as Lloyd Morgan and Broad do, that emergence occurs within the domain of physics. Physicists believe that in due course their equations will become adequate to deal with all aspects of the behaviour of inorganic matter, so that, for example, it will be possible to predict all the properties of a chemical compound which no chemist has yet made. On the other hand the behaviour of organic matter requires at some stage the use of teleological laws and of the variables necessary to deal with conscious life. There is thus a great difference between the organic and the inorganic, so great that, as we have seen, most people think it can be accounted for only by dualistic assumptions, or by the theory that, despite appearances, inorganic matter does require for a full account of its nature the use of the other variables required in dealing with organic matter. Lenin, in the passage quoted above, concedes the possibility of this latter doctrine: "... in the foundation of the structure of matter one can only surmise the existence of a faculty akin to sensation". This suggests that, for the moment at least, he saw the inadequacy of the doctrine of leaps, and indeed of materialism, for the "existence of a faculty akin to sensation" in the "foundation of the structure of matter" implies the abandonment of materialism.

Despite the authority of Lenin, however, this idea is unorthodox. The *Textbook of Marxist Philosophy* says: "Dialectical materialism will have nothing to do with hylozoism or pan-psychism: it does not believe that life and mind have always existed in imperfect degrees .... It believes that they appeared for the first time at a definite period in the history of matter."<sup>7</sup> Haldane, on the other hand, seems to hold some such view: "I suggest that the mind has physical properties analogous to those of a single electron or atom, properties which are lost in a group of trillions of atoms with the low degree of organisation found in a stone, but which may be accentuated when the same

---

<sup>7</sup> Lewis (ed): *Textbook of Marxist Philosophy*, p.14.

number of atoms is organised in a mouse or a man .... If the world consisted of such self-existent particles (as the Newtonians assume) there would be no room in it for mind ..... my own view is that it is just through the contradictions in the crude view of nature that we can see, if only in the dimmest way as yet, how it has been possible for life, and later for mind, to arise."<sup>8</sup> However, he is probably referring to the physical properties of mind.

Thus far the doctrine of leaps or crises as a solution for the problem of emergence. Another such solution is provided by the formula of the unity of opposites. Haldane says: ".... in the chemistry of proteins, the physical basis of life, the union of opposites is a condition for the emergence of novelty."<sup>9</sup> The opposites he refers to are acid and basic groups, which both occur in amino-acids, "a beautiful example of the union of opposites," which can combine to produce proteins.

In what sense are acids and bases opposites? It would be equally apt to call them complementaries. It is because the diamats have their eyes fixed on the class struggle that they favour the word opposite. In most of their chemical functions acids and bases are complementary. The special kind of combination of acid and basic groups which constitute an amino-acid is important not even because of the complementary functions of these groups, but because it permits of the formation of long chains, which however, unlike the simple hydrocarbon chains, also contain nitrogen atoms. It is hard to see what significance opposition has here. No ground whatever is given for attributing to this opposition any creative function.

Another case is evolution as the outcome of the "dialectical opposition" between mutation and selection.<sup>10</sup> The

---

<sup>8</sup> Haldane: *The Marxist Philosophy and the Sciences*, pp. 146-48.

<sup>9</sup> Haldane: *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>10</sup> Haldane: *Ibid.*, p. 118.

only situation which has some resemblance to opposition results from the third of the three ways Haldane describes in which mutation and selection may co-operate to cause evolution: "Where a mutation is common, any gene which protects the organism against its results will be favoured by selection. Thus . . . mutant genes which were originally more or less dominant, become first recessive and then inactive. Meanwhile the accumulation of protective genes causes the organism to evolve. Here at last we have a suggested cause for evolution which has nothing to do with the environment on the one hand, nor with any mysterious inner urge on the other. It is, in fact, a beautifully dialectical theory."<sup>11</sup>

There is no opposition between mutation and selection here. There is what may be regarded as opposition between the gene which undergoes the *harmful mutation* and the gene which protects the organism from its ill-effects. What causes the new quality, if any, is the second gene; though, once it has occurred, its prevalence is favoured by selection in the way described. Haldane admits that selection cannot be creative.<sup>12</sup>

A third case of opposition is one originally suggested by Samuel Butler. "Consciousness in many cases arises from a conflict of reflexes or habits. We are normally unconscious of breathing. A resistance or a heightened chemical stimulus makes us conscious of it, often unpleasantly so. We perform some simple task, such as knitting, unconsciously. It is only a change in the pattern or a break in the yarn which recalls us to consciousness of it. In order to do something out of the routine we must make an act of will, and consciousness is a preliminary to this . . . (Butler) suggested that consciousness always arose in this way, and that this was its historical origin. . . . Butler's theory does not seem to be impossible, and . . . it would, if

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

confirmed, be in harmony with dialectical materialism." <sup>13</sup>

In one of the instances quoted to illustrate this suggestion we have something which can be called opposition. If in sleep one's breathing is obstructed by pressure on the chest, one tends to wake up, and such pressure can be called opposition. In the other instance, when the knitter comes to a change in the pattern, there is nothing which can be called opposition. It is something to do which requires attention. What Butler is driving at is the idea that effort or will gives rise to consciousness. It does not matter whether this is the case or, as Haldane puts it, consciousness is preliminary to will. In either event there must first be a desire to perform the non-routine or more difficult or obstructed act. The desire is what is essential, and that is mental. In fact opposition is primarily a conflict of desires or wills, or a conflict of desire with some obstruction; it is only metaphorically a relation between two inanimate objects or abstract entities. The official view of diamat is that nature is inanimate; but the dialectic is a projection upon this inanimate nature of the passions of men.

Thus the doctrine of opposition supplies no explanation of emergence. Like crisis and leap, opposition is a word.

The other contribution of diamat to the solution of the problem of emergence makes use of the word "interpenetrate". Haldane says that when two atoms combine chemically they interpenetrate: the paths of some outer electrons may go round both nuclei; and this makes materialism more plausible. He does not suggest how substances in which electron orbits go round two nuclei display purposive behaviour or the qualities of emotion or thought or sentience. He is confusing complexity with the emergence of new qualities. Mere complexity has no tendency

---

<sup>13</sup> Haldane: *Ibid.*, pp. 126-27.

to produce novelty. It may be that the special type of complexity which we call organisation has such a tendency. But organisation is complexity for a purpose.

According to some students of diamat there is no possible solution of the problem of emergence. C. P. Dutt, reviewing H. Levy's book *A Philosophy for a Modern Man*, says: "Chapter IV: 'What Causes Change?' ..... The very formulation of the question is meaningless and indicates a wrong approach. Movement as applied to matter is change in general, and the question is equivalent to asking what is the cause of motion? Engels himself gives the reply in saying: 'Matter and its mode of existence, motion, are uncreatable and therefore are their own final cause' .... Like an eighteenth-century materialist, Levy wants a cause of motion."<sup>14</sup>

If that is the true view of diamat on the problem of emergence, we can understand the sterility of its formulae of leaps, the unity of opposites, and interpenetration.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> *Labour Monthly*, April, 1938.

<sup>15</sup> H. B. Acton points out another inconsistency in the diamat doctrine of emergence; or rather an inconsistency between the abstract doctrine and the political use to which it is put. The dialectical leap is declared to produce novelty which is unpredictable, whereas at the political level the communists claim to know where the next leap is taking us and to lead mankind through it (see *The Illusion of the Epoch*).

## CHAPTER V

### P U R P O S E

IN spite of the considerations put forward in Chapter I above, it is the usual assumption that matter which behaves according to causal laws is purely material. Causal laws are those of the type which are valid in physics and its special branches, chemistry, astronomy, etc. They make it possible, in principle, to deduce the situation at any time from a knowledge of the situation at two moments prior to that time. (The processes of atomic physics seem to be exceptions, but it is possible to ignore them for the present purpose).

There are, however, laws of another type which seem to govern the behaviour of some systems: these are teleological laws, those which require reference to the situation at some future time, a goal, purpose or plan, and thus presuppose something like foresight and therefore mentality. Causal processes operate, and causal laws are fully exemplified, from moment to moment; whereas teleological processes need a finite time in which to work themselves out. Purely material processes are fully dealt with by causal laws; processes which need teleological laws are not purely material but partly mental.

*Prima facie* the behaviour of living creatures needs teleological laws for adequate treatment. The living creature is born, grows to maturity, reproduces, declines and dies; and all the normal members of any one species follow this course according to much the same time-table, and closely resemble each other at corresponding times. Thus their growth seems to be guided by a plan. Moreover, a living organism is made up of organs and systems which seem to serve various purposes of the whole. Again, all organisms are of immensely complex and ingenious construction, far surpassing the capacity of their own mind, or of any other known mind, to imitate. Finally, as the

doctrine of evolution came to be accepted, many interpreted it as showing evidence of a purpose, *viz.*, to produce creatures of ever higher intelligence or other spiritual quality.

The apparently planful and purposive character of organic phenomena was the basis of the traditional "argument from design," which if it could not prove a Creator in the full sense demanded by theology, at least pointed to the operation in nature of an intelligence or intelligences greatly superior to man's. This argument seemed to be gradually undermined as men explored the working of the living organism and showed that many of its processes follow the laws of physics. Bold spirits began to declare that, despite appearances, the organism is a machine, the working of which will one day be fully explained by the physical sciences.

The materialist doctrine would not, however, have made much progress but for Darwin and the doctrine of natural selection. Natural selection provides a causal explanation of what appear to be instances of purpose, *viz.*, adaptations, and of the apparently teleological process of organic evolution. There are other ways in which apparent purposiveness might be explained on mechanistic assumptions. Any system in equilibrium if disturbed tends to return towards the position of equilibrium. This return, possibly from many points of departure, towards a single preordained condition, might well be misinterpreted as purposive. But natural selection is by far the best instance of a mechanistic principle which simulates purposiveness. If then the appearance of purposiveness in adaptations and in evolution is illusory, and these occurrences are really mechanistic, it is argued that this may be the case with other apparently purposive processes. If so, the argument from design is disproved, and materialism becomes a tenable theory.

Whether at its own level natural selection is a sound account of evolution is still disputed. Some biologists say



that the evolution of some species shows signs of direction, which appears to be determined otherwise than by selection, and often has the reverse of survival value and may even lead to extinction. This phenomenon is called orthogenesis. The stock instance is the development of ever more elaborate offensive or defensive armament, which eventually proves to be more cumbrous than useful; though this seems likely to be explicable as due to selection by fighting within the species. More convincing instances are the evolution of complex organs like the eye, which would have little if any survival value at a rudimentary stage, and accordingly would not be favoured by natural selection. Even more convincing is the intmensely complex behaviour of many creatures, such as *Microstoma*, mentioned by E. S. Russell,<sup>1</sup> which he contends can be explained only in terms of a goal and activity directed towards the goal. Others say that variation and mutation are not random, as Darwinism claims, but adaptive. There are still followers of Lamarck, who believe that variation occurs in accordance with the desire or effort of the organism. There is some, but doubtful, experimental evidence that characters acquired by practice or effort can be transmitted to the offspring. It is argued that natural selection should lead to organisms whose behaviour is instinctive and closely adapted to the environment, not to organisms possessing a general intelligence. It is still more difficult to account in terms of natural selection for the evolution of characters which have no apparent survival value, such as the human aesthetic faculty.

Nevertheless, the majority of biologists consider that natural selection is a satisfactory explanation of evolution. But that is not to say that it is a satisfactory explanation of all the phenomena of life. The doctrine of natural selection rests on certain presuppositions which it does not attempt to account for. It presupposes that living beings have come into existence, that they produce seed or eggs, that

---

<sup>1</sup> E. S. Russell: *The Directiveness of Organic Activities*.

these grow into adults which resemble their parents but also differ from them, and that such variation, in particular mutation, can introduce radically new characters. These are far-reaching assumptions indeed.

The origin of life is still a matter merely of speculation. There occurs in the tissues of many living creatures a certain chemical substance which is capable of existing in two enantiomorphic (mirror-image) forms; only one of these is ever found, though no reason is known why the other should not occur. This fact is taken as suggesting that living matter originated on one occasion only, or if it has originated on other occasions, these other strains died out. Thus the occurrence of all the conditions necessary for the rise of living matter was probably an event of a type which could not occur frequently. Haldane, though he inclines to think otherwise, considers that the occurrence of all the conditions necessary for the origin of life may prove to be so improbable that we shall have to take seriously the old theory that the germs of life came to the earth from outer space.<sup>2</sup> If so it may be that life has no origin but has always existed, and living creatures wherever they occur descend from other living creatures. On a subject which is still so speculative it is unnecessary to say more. It is clear that materialists cannot claim that the problem is solved in terms of their doctrine.

About reproduction and growth a great deal is known, and it is with these matters that the controversy between mechanism and vitalism was principally concerned. Many biologists still proclaim themselves mechanists, but most of these appear not to believe that all the processes of growth and reproduction can be fully explained in causal terms. A common reason for espousing mechanism is methodological: they say that science consists in establishing causal laws, and where we have to resort to purpose as an explanatory concept, science comes to an end. Needham, the

---

<sup>2</sup> J. B. S. Haldane in *New Biology*, No. 16, p. 13.

embryologist, who is not a materialist but a religious believer, adheres to mechanism explicitly on this ground.<sup>3</sup>

Some of the processes of growth and reproduction are clearly teleological. Thus, to give a familiar instance, if a fertilised ovum is cut in halves, both parts may develop into complete organisms, whereas the undivided ovum would have developed into only one organism. It is impossible, then, that the structure of the ovum should be the cause of the structure of the developed organism. A half of an animal does not have a structure similar to that of the complete animal. G. R. De Beer says: "The internal factors of an animal are possessed by the cells in all its parts . . . . But if the cells of the head possess the internal factors which control the production of a tail as well as the internal factors which control the production of a head, how is it that in normal development these cells do produce a head and not a tail? . . . . the first thing which has to be settled in a developing egg is the polarity, i.e., which part of the egg will give rise to the front and which to the hind end of the future animal. Now the determination of this polarity is the result of the action of factors which are external to the fertilised egg."<sup>4</sup> The material in the egg grows into the organism according to a plan, and the plan is external to the material at least to this extent, that it could have been imposed on the material the other way round, head to tail. That invincible sceptic Bertrand Russell says: "Our conclusion that life processes are essentially and fundamentally directive and creative may be rejected as 'metaphysical' or 'mystic'. It is of course nothing of the sort. I make no hypothesis as to the basis or ground of directiveness and creativeness. I merely accept the patent evidence that they are characteristic of living things and of them alone."

The difficulty in assenting to the purposiveness of living processes is lessened if it is remembered that when

<sup>3</sup> J. Needham: *Man a Machine*.

<sup>4</sup> G. R. De Beer: *Embryology and Evolution*, Ch. 2.

the embryonic growth comes to an end and the animal is born, it very soon begins to behave purposively in the full literal sense (if it is one of the higher animals at least): it forms projects and proceeds to carry them out. If it is human it may state the project in words or blueprints.

Further, we know that the human is able to behave in accordance with unconscious purposes. Marx postulated unconscious purposes, and the psycho-analysts and the practitioners of hypnotism have confirmed his opinion. The view that the embryo is animated by an unconscious purpose is thus made more plausible.

Such ideas as these should be acceptable to Marxian biologists, who vigorously repudiate mechanism. Haldane says: "In practice the physiologist, though he may be and should be mechanistic in his details, is never mechanistic about the organism as a whole . . . the organism is something which repairs itself and brings itself back to normal if it is not too far injured . . . it attempts to restore its original structure or function."<sup>5</sup>

The diamat view is that all types of events, including thought, are forms of the motion of matter, and that these forms become progressively higher through the course of biological evolution. The teleological behaviour of organisms is presumably a stage in this progress, which should therefore have some resemblance to the still higher stage, conscious purposive action and thought. The difference between diamat and other views concerns only the causes of this progress. Diamat says that evolutionary leaps occur at arises when two opposites come into conflict. Haldane puts it somewhat less crudely: "If it is true that we may expect to explain life, not as chemistry plus X, but as chemistry with certain principles which are not important in ordinary chemical practice emphasised to a considerable degree, it is possible that chemistry . . . will develop serious internal

---

<sup>5</sup> " " " -e: *The Marxist Philosophy and the Sciences*, pp. 104-05.

contradictions, and that it is not the biologist, but the chemist, who will do most towards bridging the gap. It is perfectly clear that I cannot suggest in any detail the lines on which such a contradiction will develop. It may be that systems much larger than a molecule, and in particular, whole cells, may prove to have a unity such as is found in a molecule, and a system of energy levels peculiar to the cell as a whole, just as a molecule has systems of energy levels which do not belong to any of its constituent atoms, but are yet not imposed on it from outside." <sup>6</sup>

This is the best diamat can do at present to suggest how the purposive behaviour of the organism may be explained. Contradictions, clashes of opposites and crises seem to be of no more value here than in accounting for the emergence of other new qualities.

Evolution by natural selection assumes that mutation can give rise to radically new characters. As we saw, in Haldane's account it is not the "opposition" between mutation and selection, but the process of mutation itself, which is believed to produce novelty. Nobody, whether a diamat or not, has yet suggested how this occurs. Very little is known about mutation. It is made more frequent in fruit-flies by treating them with X-rays, and the conjecture has therefore been made that mutation is caused by the change in position in a gene of one or more atoms, such as X-ray bombardment can bring about. It is thought that spontaneous mutation may be caused in a similar way by cosmic rays. Such a mechanism may well be supposed capable of producing kinks in the wings and changes in the eye-colour of fruit-flies, but nobody has suggested how it can cause the emergence of radically new qualities.

Thus no school of materialism, dialectical or other, has yet made any substantial progress in explaining the difference between matter which is subject only to causal laws, and organisms which obey teleological laws.

---

<sup>6</sup> Haldane: *Ibid.*, p. 105.

## CHAPTER VI

### PSYCHOLOGY

THE facts of psychology pose a difficult problem for materialism. Perhaps because this is so obvious, materialists have devoted much attention to it, and many of them have convinced themselves that mental phenomena can be brought within the ambit of their doctrine. Hence Russell, when he wrote an introduction to a new edition of Lange's *History of Materialism* thirty years ago, remarked that psychology was the most materialistic of the sciences.

Diamat is a doctrine of emergence, and therefore admits in principle that the mind is active and is capable of influencing the body. In particular, in the theory of knowledge Marx laid stress on the active part played by the mind. Yet, as we have seen, this may have referred to nothing more than the physically active part men have played in history and in production. The diamats have not stressed the activity of the mind in other relations. Cornforth mentions with emphasis that the mind is active in sensation,<sup>1</sup> but he makes no use or application of this fact. Diamat has always been anxious to uphold determinism. In relation to social affairs, though in practice the communists lay great stress on revolutionary initiative, in theory diamat confines itself to the formula that "social realities determine social consciousness".

In addition to this, the work of Pavlov has been very influential. Pavlov was not a diamat: he was one of the few persons in Russia so distinguished as to be able publicly to make fun of the dialectic. He was in fact a mechanistic materialist. Haldane, in his admirable book, *The Marxist Philosophy and the Sciences*, does not mention Pavlov, even in the chapter specially devoted to psychology.

---

<sup>1</sup> M. Cornforth: *Theory of Knowledge*, p. 22.

The prepossessions of the diamat school have wrought havoc in Russian psychology. Nobody except a fanatical adherent would demand that Freud, for example, be swallowed whole, but surely he deserves to be studied sympathetically. The diamat procedure is to attach an opprobrious label, "reactionary", "idealist", or "decadent", to a man or a doctrine, and after that nobody dares to refer to him or it except with contempt.

Because of all this the psychology of the diamats has remained substantially mechanistic. Thus Cornforth<sup>2</sup> takes his account of Mind and Body from Pavlov. He sets forth the doctrine of conditioned reflexes, and asserts that "the mechanism of reflexes is found in the brain, in the connections which exist between the sensory and motor centres in the brain." "Pavlov insisted that mental activity is the same as higher nervous activity." "Mental life begins when things begin to take on a meaning for the animal, and this happens precisely when the animal, as a result of the formation of conditioned reflexes, begins to learn to connect one thing with another. Something has a meaning for an animal when the animal has learned to connect its presence with something else." "To be aware of things is essentially an active state . . . not simply to be affected by them but to respond to them. Awareness means first that the animal discriminates certain features of its environment and responds to them; secondly that it attaches meaning to various features of its environment in the sense that it connects them with other things. Thus it is able to form expectations and to learn by experience."

"In this way the formation of conditioned reflexes gives rise to the difference between the subjective and the objective. It is simply the difference between the totality of material conditions, and the aspects of them of which the animal is aware and the meaning it attaches to them.

---

<sup>2</sup> M. Cornforth: *Ibid*, Ch. 1 and 2.

"It is, then, in the activity of the nervous system—the activity of building complicated and variable relations with the external world—that *consciousness* arises. When the stimulations begin to act as signals and the animal learns to recognise them and to regulate its behaviour accordingly, then a new quality comes into existence in the nervous process, namely consciousness. It is the new quality that distinguishes the life process of the brain.

"Pavlov regarded speech as a 'second signal system' developed as an addition to the first signal system of sensations. He regarded the development of the second signal system as the basis of the development of all the higher mental activity of man. Sensations are 'concrete signals': words are 'signals of the first signals'. Thus what we say depends on our intentions. Hence words represent an abstraction from reality and permit the formation of generalisations, which constitute our specifically human, higher mentality. The second signal system, speech, arises and functions only in inseparable connection with the first. Without sensation there can be no speech and no thought. At the same time the development of the first signal system in man is also conditioned by that of the second. The development in man of the second signal system from the first is socially determined, a result of the productive activity and social intercourse of men."

There is little need to criticise these crude applications or inferences from Pavlov's work. The assumption of separate sensory and motor centres in the brain is doubtful: the brain acts for most purposes as a whole.<sup>3</sup> The unconditioned reflex, which is taken as the basic unit of the psychical structure, itself depends on the psychic whole. Thus unless the dog has a desire for food his saliva will not flow when it is presented to him.

Despite the use of the word "active", the diamat psy-

<sup>3</sup> cf., Haldane: *The Marxist Philosophy and the Sciences*, p. 142.



chology takes little account of desire. Thus perception in the sense of recognition of an object as of a desirable or undesirable type must take place first before there can be a reflex of this kind, whereas Cornforth makes perception follow the building up of a system of conditioned reflexes. In a similar way he makes generalisation follow and depend upon the use of words. But most words other than proper names are general and can have come into use only as a result of generalisation. Children generalise before they learn appropriate words: they use one word to denote a variety of things having some possibly quite slight resemblance to each other. Speech is in fact a psychical activity, and more particularly an emotional activity. What it communicates is meanings, wholes, not signal words or concepts. To represent it as physiological, as this theory does, is quite unsound.

The assumptions of the theory are mechanistic, and when it runs into the inevitable difficulties of mechanism it ignores them. Thus no indication is given how "building complicated and variable relations with the external world" produces consciousness. This is a crucial point in a materialistic theory: Cornforth takes it in his stride as if the appearance of such a "new quality" were something quite commonplace.

Haldane's attempt<sup>4</sup> to outline a materialistic psychology is more promising. It equates mind with the electrical rhythms of the whole brain, arguing that just as a cell becomes a unity by developing energy levels of its own, which do not exist in its constituent molecules, so the brain has energy levels of its own. The merit of this sketch is that it sees that the brain functions as a whole: the attempt to deal with mental activity as composed of reflexes will not work. It will not work, indeed, as a theory of the mental activity even of apes. Kohler in his classical study found that the doctrine of stimulus and response was inadequate:

---

<sup>4</sup> Haldane: *Ibid.*, p. 142.

apes behave intelligently in the light of the meaning of the whole situation.

Analytical procedures, physiological and psychological, have their interest and value, but they cannot replace the study of the mind as a whole, nor of the mind as it appears to the observer who knows it best, namely itself. Diamat grants that when we perform an act of will which moves the body, the act of will is really moving the body, though it is also a material process. Diamat grants that when we believe our conduct to be influenced by desire, ambition, imagination, loyalty to principle or enthusiasm for an ideal, we are not mistaken; but at the same time the whole process is material. That mental processes are material is very hard to believe, but if the doctrine of emergence is valid, we may have to swallow our incredulity. Diamat however holds that we are mistaken when we assume that in making a choice between alternative acts or motives we are choosing freely. Diamat insists on determinism, and free choice seems to be incompatible with determinism.

At first sight it may appear that the diamats are arbitrary in refusing to admit the emergence of freedom. If material processes can be conscious, purposive, and sensitive to values, why can they not be free? The diamats may however be right in denying that a material process can be free. It may well be in some respects indeterminate, but despite the speculations of some eminent scientific men, it is not convincing to regard physical indeterminacy as corresponding to freedom of choice. The fact is that mental events as we know them are so completely different from physical events as we imagine them that no theory which identifies the two has any plausibility in itself. We can be persuaded of it only for other reasons.

We seem to be aware of freedom in making choices, and it is unlikely that we are mistaken. The fact that materialism is incompatible with freedom is a traditional weakness of that theory. *Diamat* however claims to overcome this weakness. It believes in freedom in the sense

conveyed by the formula: "Freedom is the recognition of necessity." It justifies this by arguing that in order to act, knowledge of the circumstances is necessary: such knowledge facilitates action and is therefore equivalent to freedom. Clearly this is a mistake. Knowledge of relevant facts helps to make an action effective, but has no bearing on the freedom or unfreedom of the act of will which initiates the action, since this act of will is the same, whether the ensuing action succeeds or fails. The question of free-will concerns the act of choice.

The formula "freedom is the recognition of necessity" is Hegelian. In Hegel's system, necessity is determination by another: freedom is determination by the self. But by this must be understood the true self, which is universality. If I act according to my selfish interests, I act against universality, for my selfish interests are of Nature, not of Spirit. I am therefore not free. If I obey the law, or the moral law, I obey the universal, which is myself, and so I am self-determined and therefore free. Thus I am free only when I co-operate with the cosmic process, the self-manifestation of the Idea. This is the Hegelian doctrine of freedom.

For a materialist, the cosmic process has no special sanctity. It is not guided by any purpose, and leads to nothing which can be regarded as valuable. Indeed the cosmic process is an unintelligible conception in materialism: the world is not a process, but a haphazard assemblage of purposeless events. But for a dialectic this is not true. Engels says: "Hegel was the first to state correctly the relation between freedom and necessity. 'Necessity is blind only in so far as it is not understood.' Freedom does not consist in the dream of independence from natural laws, but in the knowledge of those laws, and in the possibility this gives of systematically making them work towards definite ends. Freedom of the will therefore means nothing but the capacity to make decisions with knowledge of the subject .... Freedom consists in the control over ourselves and over external nature .... it is a product of historical

methods of "faith healing" are successful sufficiently often to make it certain that there is a causal connection between the states of mind they are concerned to induce and the healing process. If the reader is sceptical, he need inquire of only a few neighbours to meet with such cases. I myself know three cases: in one a fractured humerus was healed in one night while a Christian Science practitioner performed her ministrations—the facts were certified by an orthodox medical man; in another a leprosy case and in another a heart condition, both pronounced hopeless cases by orthodox medicine, were cured completely in a few days after visits to the ashram of Sai Baba at Shirdi. Alexis Carrel, a medical man of high calibre, describes a case as remarkable as these in his book *The Voyage to Lourdes*.

The ordinary emergent materialism can make some attempt to accommodate these facts, but it is very hard to see how the Pavlovian apparatus of conditioned reflexes, which is orthodoxy with the diamats, can do so.

---

development. Each step forward in the field of culture was a step towards freedom . . . . the generation of fire by friction gave man for the first time control over one of the forces of nature, forces which alone make possible a state of society in which there are no longer class distinctions . . . ." <sup>5</sup> It is clear from this passage that at the back of Engels's mind was the Hegelian idea of co-operation with the cosmic process as the true nature of freedom. It is hardly necessary to repeat that this doctrine is not consistent with materialism, and that it merely dodges the real question of freewill, by changing it, in the usual diamat fashion, from an individual to a social and historical question. Freedom of the will and control over nature are entirely different things.

The diamat theory of conditioned reflexes and signal systems is formulated to account for sensori-motor and intellectual phenomena. It is inadequate for the purpose, but its inadequacy is still more obvious when we consider the emotions and their effects upon the body. Here the mind-body relation seems clearly the reverse of that assumed by materialism. The power of an ambition, a theory, an ideal to force the body to serve it, to the limit of exhaustion or martyrdom, is shown by innumerable lives, from Marx to Gandhi. Yogis carry this familiar principle some stages further, though perhaps in a somewhat different direction. In quite worldly affairs it is a commonplace that the power of the mental to the material is three to one, and none in fact know better than communists the value of the will to win.

Among those familiar in ordinary experience, the most sensational instances of the power of the mind over the body are those concerning disease and similar states. A great variety of diseases have been traced, in particular instances, to psychological causes and have been cured by psycho-somatic techniques. "Christian Science" and other

---

<sup>5</sup> Engels: *Anti-Duhring*, I, XI.

methods of "faith healing" are successful sufficiently often to make it certain that there is a causal connection between the states of mind they are concerned to induce and the healing process. If the reader is sceptical, he need inquire of only a few neighbours to meet with such cases. I myself know three cases: in one a fractured humerus was healed in one night while a Christian Science practitioner performed her ministrations—the facts were certified by an orthodox medical man; in another a leprosy case and in another a heart condition, both pronounced hopeless cases by orthodox medicine, were cured completely in a few days after visits to the ashram of Sai Baba at Shirdi. Alexis Carrel, a medical man of high calibre, describes a case as remarkable as these in his book *The Voyage to Lourdes*.

The ordinary emergent materialism can make some attempt to accommodate these facts, but it is very hard to see how the Pavlovian apparatus of conditioned reflexes, which is orthodoxy with the diamats, can do so.

---

## CHAPTER VII

### M Y S T I C I S M

THROUGHOUT history there have been people of the type called mystics. They agree in attaching supreme importance to certain experiences, which are usually said to elude direct expression, but often achieve indirect expression in art, poetry or action of high value, or in philosophy. Such experiences have occurred to a considerable number of people and show some similarities. They may be regarded as evidence of an order of existence and values superior to the material order. The evidence is not conclusive, but it must count in favour of any theory of the world that it makes place for this evidence. Correspondingly it is a weakness of any theory that it implies, as materialism does, that this evidence is necessarily worthless.

A materialist school which was willing to digest the discoveries of the psycho-analysts might make a plausible attempt to account for the phenomena of mysticism in naturalistic terms. Diamat scorns psycho-analysis, and therefore must adopt the unsatisfactory course of ignoring or sneering at mysticism.

---

## CHAPTER VIII

### PARAPSYCHOLOGY

THE acceptance of materialism must have been checked in early times by the common belief in miraculous or supernatural occurrences—the foreseeing of future events, the knowledge of contemporaneous but distant events, thought-reading, apparitions, especially at the time of death or other crisis, ghosts, poltergeists, levitation and other phenomena associated with asceticism and yoga. With the rise of science in the 17th century, belief in such occurrences declined. Aggressive unbelief, aimed mainly at clericalism and secondarily at religion, included these beliefs in its sweeping attack on “superstition”, and was helped, no doubt, in doing so by the exposure of charlatans.

However, there were always cases which defied the debunkers. For a century past there has been systematic research into the subject by men of high ability, whose honesty cannot be questioned, and their research has produced strong evidence for most of these types of “supernatural” phenomena.

Almost all these facts are difficult for materialists. (They are difficult for most theories, but we are discussing materialism). Consider the phenomenon for which the greatest volume of evidence has been accumulated—telepathy. Closely related mental events—visions, words, non-verbalised ideas, emotions, urges to action—occur to two people (occasionally more than two) at a distance, and in the absence of any detectable or imaginable means of communication. Alternative explanations such as coincidence are eliminated; a connection of the type which between normal events would be called causal must be assumed.

Positivists may ignore the absence of a physical connection, and talk about correlations among observed facts, but materialists cannot do so. They must assume a chain



of physical occurrences connecting the two associated events. But no such chain is forthcoming. While in most instances the two events are fairly near each other in space, this is not always so : in some experimental cases the two persons have been hundreds of miles apart, and in some spontaneous cases, thousands of miles apart. A woman in India had a highly realistic vision of her brother on the day of his death in France. The person known as Mrs. Holland, who performed "automatic writing", was living in India when she wrote some of the passages which proved to be complementary to passages written by automatists in England and with them made up the celebrated "cross-correspondences". The messages purported to come from the surviving mind of a dead man, but if they came from a living person, that person probably lived in England. Mrs. Holland knew nothing of the matter and had never heard of any of the other people concerned.

J. B. S. Haldane, almost the only diamat who has deigned to discuss these facts, suggests a line of explanation consistent with materialism. He points out that some of the laws of mental phenomena are unlike the laws of classical physics but like those governing the behaviour of very small pieces of matter. Thus mental events cannot be accurately located in time or space. If the mind, as he suggests, is associated with the electrical rhythms of the brain, ideas could be physical objects, but of very small mass and correspondingly indefinite location. In that case, just as there is no absolute distinction between two electrons, so there might be no absolute distinction between ideas or sensations in different minds. Electrically charged particles will leak through an electrostatic barrier which according to classical theory ought to be an absolute bar to them ; perhaps mental entities can do the same sort of thing, with a similar appearance of purposiveness. "I do not see," he concludes, "why a dialectical materialist should reject *a priori* the possibility of such alleged phenomena as telepathy and clairvoyance . . . . I can see no reason for regarding a certain lack of privacy in mental images as on the one hand impossible or on the other hand miraculous . . .

if these occurrences should be proved, I do not think that this would disprove materialism."<sup>1</sup>

Haldane's ingenious thought-model is open to serious objection on the facts of parapsychology. Though he says that we should expect paranormal events to be rare, his theory suggests no reason why some people should have conspicuously greater abilities in the matter than others. On his view, all humans and all ideas would be expected to stand more or less on the same level. Secondly, such an electrical structure as he postulates would presumably be cut off by a barrier of material of high conductivity, and by great thicknesses of any sort of material. An exchange of an idea between a brain in France and one in India is difficult to fit into his picture.

Again, not all occurrences of this type involve two persons sharing a common idea in the way this theory is alone fitted to explain. A frequent telepathic phenomenon is a hallucinatory vision of a person, often at or near the moment of death, by another person. Does the dying man have a vision of himself? That is surely unlikely. A, the dying man, presumably (but not certainly—there is evidence of his doing so in some cases) thinks of his friend B; and this causes B to form a vision of A. This is hardly sharing a common idea. However, some plausible extension of Haldane's hypothesis could perhaps accommodate this fact.

But no possible extension of it could cover the cases, otherwise rather similar, of hallucinatory vision of a dead man. A, a person visiting a certain house, has visions which turn out on inquiry to be identifiable with B, a former occupant of the house, now dead. Other persons, C, D, also "see" B, without having been told about it. This phenomenon has been familiar from ancient times, and there are many well-substantiated modern cases. It defies explanation on Haldane's theory.

---

<sup>1</sup> Haldane: *The Marxist Philosophy and the Sciences*, p. 147.

Equally fatal to this theory is the fact that it cannot provide for precognitive telepathy, *i.e.*, knowing what somebody else is going to think some time in the future. The evidence for this is also very strong. I need only refer the sceptic to the account of S. G. Soal's classical experiments in Antony Flew's book, *A New Approach to Psychical Research* (pp. 90-104). Flew has a strong prepossession against the paranormal, and seems to me unfair to the evidence in several places, but he finds no flaw in these experiments and has to admit the reality of precognition. To the materialist or the orthodox scientific man precognition is completely baffling, but there is a great deal of convincing evidence, in addition to the reports of the regular psychical researchers. The popular books of "Cheiro", the professional "seer" who died some years ago, contain several well authenticated cases. But precognition not only defies explanation on the lines of Haldane's suggestion: it defies all accepted scientific doctrine, and must, I think, be considered incompatible with materialism.

Some students believe that psychical research has proved the survival, after the death of the physical body, of some mental entity capable at least of memory, and in some instances of purposive communication. If this is true, and if the surviving entity is non-material, this constitutes a disproof of materialism. However, the proof of survival is not easy. To prove telepathy, clairvoyance, and precognition is in principle relatively simple: eliminating chance, fraud and normal physical explanations, it is merely necessary to establish facts of observation. Survival is not a matter of observed fact but of inference, and inference in a region in which it is extremely difficult to determine whether what we say has any meaning. Facts pointing to survival, moreover, can always be given an alternative explanation in terms of telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition and the activity of the unconscious minds of living persons.

Thus a type of evidence which suggests survival is the statements of children who claim to remember former

incarnations. A child refers to facts concerning the life of a person who died some time before he was born, in a way which suggests that they are the "same" person. In some instances, it is said, a child has revealed objects concealed by "himself" in his former life, and unknown to anybody else.

A few such cases have been reported elsewhere, but most occur in countries where the belief in reincarnation is common, especially India. It is a pity that there is no organisation in India of the nature of a psychical research society, devoted to the scrutiny of reports of this kind. Obviously we cannot rely upon the uncorroborated statements of the parents and neighbours of such children. But even if we had a case in which there was no doubt about the facts, we could not conclude that reincarnation is proved, because every possible fact of this kind can be explained otherwise: the child could have learnt all the data, in perfect good faith, by telepathy and clairvoyance.

Though all evidence suggesting survival is open to similar objections, it should not be thought that the case is weak. On the contrary, it is strong, and many intelligent persons have been convinced by it. The "cross-correspondence" cases associated with F. W. H. Myers are still probably the best. Myers, one of the founders of the Society for Psychical Research of London, died in 1901, and the cases began soon after that and continued for nearly 20 years. Automatists produced messages in automatic writing, and mediums produced them in speech. These automatists and mediums did not at first know each other. Most of the messages purported to come from Myers, and some from friends of his, and at some point most of them explicitly claimed to be attempts to prove that he or they still lived. The proofs consisted of allusions to some recondite topic in English, Italian, Latin or Greek literature. The allusions in any one medium's material were unintelligible, but when passages from two or three different mediums were brought together they were found to explain each other and to make sense. There is no doubt about the

Equally fatal to this theory is the fact that it cannot provide for precognitive telepathy, *i.e.*, knowing what somebody else is going to think some time in the future. The evidence for this is also very strong. I need only refer the sceptic to the account of S. G. Soal's classical experiments in Antony Flew's book, *A New Approach to Psychical Research* (pp. 90-104). Flew has a strong prepossession against the paranormal, and seems to me unfair to the evidence in several places, but he finds no flaw in these experiments and has to admit the reality of precognition. To the materialist or the orthodox scientific man precognition is completely baffling, but there is a great deal of convincing evidence, in addition to the reports of the regular psychical researchers. The popular books of "Cheiro", the professional "seer" who died some years ago, contain several well authenticated cases. But precognition not only defies explanation on the lines of Haldane's suggestion: it defies all accepted scientific doctrine, and must, I think, be considered incompatible with materialism.

Some students believe that psychical research has proved the survival, after the death of the physical body, of some mental entity capable at least of memory, and in some instances of purposive communication. If this is true, and if the surviving entity is non-material, this constitutes a disproof of materialism. However, the proof of survival is not easy. To prove telepathy, clairvoyance, and precognition is in principle relatively simple: eliminating chance, fraud and normal physical explanations, it is merely necessary to establish facts of observation. Survival is not a matter of observed fact but of inference, and inference in a region in which it is extremely difficult to determine whether what we say has any meaning. Facts pointing to survival, moreover, can always be given an alternative explanation in terms of telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition and the activity of the unconscious minds of living persons.

Thus a type of evidence which suggests survival is the statements of children who claim to remember former

incarnations. A child refers to facts concerning the life of a person who died some time before he was born, in a way which suggests that they are the "same" person. In some instances, it is said, a child has revealed objects concealed by "himself" in his former life, and unknown to anybody else.

A few such cases have been reported elsewhere, but most occur in countries where the belief in reincarnation is common, especially India. It is a pity that there is no organisation in India of the nature of a psychical research society, devoted to the scrutiny of reports of this kind. Obviously we cannot rely upon the uncorroborated statements of the parents and neighbours of such children. But even if we had a case in which there was no doubt about the facts, we could not conclude that reincarnation is proved, because every possible fact of this kind can be explained otherwise: the child could have learnt all the data, in perfect good faith, by telepathy and clairvoyance.

Though all evidence suggesting survival is open to similar objections, it should not be thought that the case is weak. On the contrary, it is strong, and many intelligent persons have been convinced by it. The "cross-correspondence" cases associated with F. W. H. Myers are still probably the best. Myers, one of the founders of the Society for Psychical Research of London, died in 1901, and the cases began soon after that and continued for nearly 20 years. Automatists produced messages in automatic writing, and mediums produced them in speech. These automatists and mediums did not at first know each other. Most of the messages purported to come from Myers, and some from friends of his, and at some point most of them explicitly claimed to be attempts to prove that he or they still lived. The proofs consisted of allusions to some recondite topic in English, Italian, Latin or Greek literature. The allusions in any one medium's material were unintelligible, but when passages from two or three different mediums were brought together they were found to explain each other and to make sense. There is no doubt about the

good faith of the persons concerned ; there is also no doubt about the evidence, which is all documentary, and is perfectly clear ; and it cannot be seriously argued that the effects are due to chance. It has been shown in each case that Myers or his friends, who were learned men, had had the necessary knowledge, whereas none of the investigators or mediums were familiar with all the references, and some of the references needed a good deal of research and were only cleared up years afterwards. Further, in some cases the impersonation of the supposed communicators, by characteristic attitudes, tricks of speech, and so forth was said to be strikingly good. On the face of it the proof of the survival of Myers and the other supposed communicators is very strong.

More than that. Several people suggested that an alternative explanation was possible : *viz.*, that the unconscious mind of a living person was responsible. There is independent evidence that some persons' unconscious minds are capable of acquiring information telepathically from other minds, and clairvoyantly from books, and of conveying it telepathically to mediums. All these critics guessed that the person responsible was Mrs. Verrall, one of the automatists, who had known Myers and the others well. She was herself a scholar, and though she did not consciously remember all the references, she may have known some of them unconsciously, and would have known where to look for the rest. The only serious alternative yet proposed to the hypothesis of survival is this suggestion that the unconscious mind of Mrs. Verrall devised the puzzles, and it is not very plausible. It implies that this perfectly honest and very learned woman—of course unconsciously—perpetrated a fraud upon science, the Society for Psychical Research, her friends and herself, keeping it up for more than ten years, and going to much trouble to do it. And even this theory breaks down, for Mrs. Verrall died in 1916, and a number of cases of the same type occurred after that. The only remaining alternative hypothesis, then, is that the unconscious mind of some unknown person devised the cross-correspondences.

Many other cases strongly suggest survival, and the alternative theories which can be proposed to account for the facts are roundabout and difficult to credit; but the cross-correspondence cases are probably the best. It will be agreed that evidence of this cogency would be held to prove its point in almost any other branch of scientific inquiry. However, in view of the obscurity of the subject, the difficulty of determining what any hypothesis means, and of knowing whether the given hypotheses exhaust the possibilities, it would be prudent to reserve judgement.

In the light of the facts presented in this chapter, materialism in any form is almost certainly untenable. It looks at first sight as if telepathy might be explained by some material mechanism, but neither Haldane's nor any other that has been proposed meets the case. Moreover, the other phenomena make materialistic explanations even more difficult. In particular, precognition stands quite outside the bounds of science as we know it. All these facts are well established and are no longer regarded by students of psychical research as subject to doubt. Perhaps it is best to regard them as manifestations of an order of reality different from the material order.

The survival of a non-material entity after the death of the body would by itself be a complete refutation of materialism, but the evidence for survival, of some entity of an unknown nature, though very suggestive, is not, in my opinion, conclusive. However, in discussing the philosophy of nature we cannot always hope for certainty; we must sometimes go on probabilities. Survival, though not proved, is sufficiently probable to demand not to be ignored. It is dogmatic to adhere to a philosophy such as materialism which makes survival impossible. \*

---

\* In honesty I should admit that I do not feel entirely convinced by this evidence. I can see no flaw in it, but I have a lingering expectation that somehow, some day, it will be shown to be unsound. This doubt is almost certainly emotional: I am unwilling to accept facts which are incompatible with any world picture, materialistic or otherwise, yet formulated.



## CHAPTER IX

### M A T E R I A L I S M

UP to this point the argument has concerned materialism mainly, and only secondarily the dialectical version. As the reader will have noticed, the dialectic has contributed nothing to the solution of the traditional difficulties of materialism.

If parapsychology is ignored and attention is confined to the normal facts, materialism, though not very plausible, remains a tenable theory, if it is granted that emergence may occur. If emergence is considered impossible, materialism is untenable. The credibility of materialism then turns largely on the credibility of emergence, and if we ignore parapsychology, emergence seems to be an undecidable question.

If emergence is denied, materialism is untenable, and there seem then to be two broad possibilities: dualism, or a monistic theory postulating a nature which must have the characteristics of mind, and may in addition have those ascribed to matter.

The facts of parapsychology are as yet little understood, and it would be rash to draw dogmatic conclusions from them; but so far as can now be judged, they argue against emergence and against materialism, and in favour of dualism. Dualism is of course an unsatisfactory theory. But the facts of parapsychology as they stand today inevitably place the philosophy of nature in an unsatisfactory position. Undoubtedly the wisest conclusion is that it is premature to formulate a philosophy of nature.

---

## PART II

### CHAPTER X

#### PARTY PHILOSOPHY

IN Hegel's system, history is represented as exemplifying the dialectical progress of the Idea. All human institutions, laws, moralities, philosophies, are necessary to the stage of evolution in which they occur. There is nothing contingent about them: they are necessary steps towards the self-realisation of the Idea.

Diamat takes essentially the same view. "We know of only one science: the science of history," said Marx.<sup>1</sup> Again: "Morality, religion, metaphysics, and ideology in general, with their appropriate forms of consciousness, thus forfeit the semblance of independence. They have no history, no evolution of their own."<sup>2</sup> Thus ideas are an essential part of the dialectical stage of evolution in which they occur, and are also dialectical steps towards the ultimate truth. Each stage of progress therefore has its characteristic philosophy, which is the truth for that stage and for the class which leads mankind into that stage. And just as each successive class fights its predecessor, so each successive philosophy opposes its predecessor in a militant spirit.

The philosophy of the proletariat and the socialist stage is diamat. It is the duty of the proletarian political party to propagate this philosophy and to preserve its orthodox form, and also to combat "the" philosophy of the bourgeoisie. Hence the doctrine of "class philosophy" and "party philosophy". Marx set the fashion, with his bad-tempered tirades against Bauer and Proudhon. Lenin made a principle of "militancy" in philosophy, and

---

<sup>1</sup> Marx: *German Ideology*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

though on a small scale, revived, after centuries, the practice of executing non-political writers purely on account of their ideas. Stalin of course horrified the world by his excesses in this matter. I am not aware that any Russian philosopher has been executed because of his philosophy, but hundreds of historians, scientific men, poets, novelists and so forth have been executed or killed at forced labour for purely ideological "faults". The Chinese communist regime compels intellectuals to conform to party orthodoxy by means which are only slightly less cruel.

"Philosophy is and always has been class philosophy. . . . A philosophy is a world outlook, an attempt to understand the world, mankind, and man's place in the world. Such an outlook cannot be anything but the outlook of a class . . . there is no philosophy which does not embody a class outlook."<sup>3</sup>

"People are prone to believe that if we adopt a partisan, class standpoint, then we turn our backs on truth . . . . But the contrary is the case. It is only when we adopt the partisan standpoint of historically the most progressive class that we are able to get nearer to truth. The definition of dialectical materialism, therefore, as the philosophy of the revolutionary working-class party is in no way incompatible with the claim of dialectical materialism to express truth, and to be a means of arriving at truth."<sup>4</sup> This clearly implies that philosophy is part of social evolution and follows its phases.

Cornforth proceeds to explain that an exploiting class must devise a philosophy which will disguise its position. Thus early bourgeois philosophy saw the world as consisting of independent atoms. This was a mirror of bourgeois society, and it disguised exploitation by representing worker and capitalist as equal and as entering into free contracts.

<sup>3</sup> M. Cornforth: *Dialectical Materialism*, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

But the working class needs no disguise, because it has no intention to exploit anyone. Its interest is in understanding things as they are. Other classes have wanted to perpetuate themselves as classes, and hence have evolved philosophies which stress the eternal and unchangeable: the working class wants to abolish itself, and is therefore opposed to systems which establish any false permanence.<sup>5</sup>

Diamat claims to inherit the philosophical wealth of the past, but it is a new departure. "It is a philosophy which serves the common people in their struggle to throw off all exploitation and to build a classless society." It is an attempt to understand the world in order to change it, in accordance with Marx's famous dictum. It is no longer an attempt to give an explanation of the world. It is an instrument of scientific investigation, a method, and at the same time a "scientific weapon in the hands of the proletarian masses". "The discovery of Marx and Engels," said Zhdanov, "represents the end of the old philosophy . . . . It marked the beginning of a completely new period in the history of philosophy . . . . the most complete and decisive negation of all preceding philosophy. But to negate does not mean merely to say no. Negation includes continuity, signifies absorption, the critical reforming and unification in a new and higher synthesis of everything advanced and progressive that has been achieved in the history of human thought."<sup>6</sup>

It is clear from these passages that the Hegelian view of a philosophy as a characteristic of a phase of human evolution persists in diamat. Though the philosophy of the proletariat, *viz.*, diamat, is regarded as such a phase, and is therefore relative, clearly the doctrine of phases claims to be absolutely true. It is also evident that the whole doctrine of class philosophy and of diamat as the philosophy of the working class stands or falls with this Hegelian doctrine

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

of philosophy as nothing more than a part of social evolution; and it is hardly necessary to say that this doctrine is false.

It follows from this theory that there are no rational grounds for belief: there are only causes of belief, and these causes are of a social nature. The only way in which philosophical beliefs can be changed is by bringing about social change: "Philosophy cannot be realised without the uprising of the proletariat."<sup>7</sup> There is therefore no sense in philosophical argument. It is noticeable in fact that books on diamat contain very little argument: they either trace the evolution of philosophical ideas, or state the position of diamat on one subject or another in a dogmatic way.

This doctrine has disturbing implications in regard to truth. If "philosophy cannot be realised without the uprising of the proletariat", there is no truth other than that enunciated on behalf of the proletarian revolution, and it is justifiable to sacrifice all apparent truth of any other character for the sake of the revolution. The license thus given to falsehood has made possible the vast two-way system of deceit called the "iron curtain", the greatest essay in mendacity known to history.

This doctrine about philosophy is sometimes confused, even by diamats, with the fact that social conditions affect philosophical and other thinking in various ways. Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia* and Russell's *History of Western Philosophy* are essays on this theme. The diamat position is quite different. It does not say that social affairs merely condition thought: it says that thought is an integral part of a dialectical, stage-by-stage social process—perhaps rather cosmic process. Thought therefore has no independent value: it is merely part of the process. Marx said this very clearly in *German Ideology*: ideas "forfeit

---

<sup>7</sup> Marx: "Hegel's Philosophy of Right."

the semblance of independence." Hecker echoes him: "Strictly . . . ideologies have no independent history . . . they are superstructures upon given class and economic foundations."<sup>8</sup> Thus it is made to seem legitimate to turn thought into a "weapon" and to urge the proletariat to hate "bourgeois" philosophers and to adhere dogmatically to the clichés and slogans taught them by the Marxists.

I am not arguing that philosophy ought to be divorced from practical life. If a philosophical exposition is given a practical implication, so much the better, at least if the implication is good. It is, however, essential that the aim of philosophical thinking should be the truth, and that practical purposes should be subordinated to it, at least while the inquiry is being conducted. Otherwise it is merely special pleading. But diamats are unperturbed when confronted with this accusation. They say that all philosophy is special pleading. "Philosophy is as partisan now as it was 2000 years ago," said Lenin.<sup>9</sup>

Thought has been affected by social, economic and other conditions. Ideological conflicts have preceded and accompanied revolutions in the past, and there have been martyrs in these conflicts. That however is no reason why in our generation we should return to these evil ways. It is many centuries since there was any philosophical intolerance in India. It existed in more recent times in Europe, but that is not a fact of which Europe should be proud. Nobody now defends the suppression of Galileo and Bruno. Hobbes and Locke thought it prudent to live abroad when their opponents were in power, but once Locke's friends came in, it was hoped that this kind of barbarism was over, as it proved to be, until Lenin took power.

During the bourgeois era there has been nothing that

---

<sup>8</sup> J. Hecker: *Russian Sociology*.

<sup>9</sup> Lenin: *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, Conclusion.

pointment of the intellectual who could not get the world to take him at his own valuation. The Marxian movement has continued to be run by *discontented intellectuals*, who "understand the whole historical process" (Engels) and tell the proletariat what it is expedient for them to believe and whom they must hate.

Cornforth gives another reason for identifying materialism with the working class. It is a repetition of Engels's definition of materialism as realism. Other theories, specifically "idealism", are considered to disguise things from the masses, while materialism reveals the truth. It is of course open to an adherent of any other theory to declare that his favourite doctrine alone reveals the truth to the masses; while materialism hides it.

Cornforth argues that bourgeois thought is hampered by an unexpressed imperative to defend exploitation. The facts do not support this idea. The founder of the diamat school was the son of a typical provincial bourgeois, who had a regular middle-class education at Bonn and Berlin. The specific material on exploitation with which he bolstered up his theory he derived from the reports of bourgeois government officials. Though at first neglected—like most original thinkers—his doctrines have now obtained very wide currency among bourgeois writers and teachers, and indeed exercise more influence than they deserve. It is noticeable that his theories appeal to non-specialists: his ideas on exploitation are accepted by millions of ordinary bourgeois, but by very few instructed economists, and his interpretation of history in terms of economic interests and class struggles is now almost a commonplace except among professional historians. These facts hardly suggest that bourgeois thought is dominated by an unconscious resistance to Marx's revelations.

Cornforth also argues that bourgeois thought unduly stresses the eternal and unchangeable. Again it is hard to see any truth in this. The bourgeois era has been a period of incessant intellectual change. The kind of

can be recognised as an orthodoxy, and every variety of thought has flourished. In some thinkers of this era, what can be considered characteristically bourgeois doctrines or ways of thought can be detected, though that usually does not account for everything they said. Locke's political theory, for example, is bourgeois, but it is largely independent of his theory of knowledge. Kant's ethics is bourgeois, perhaps, but it makes little sense to apply that adjective to the rest of his thought. Of most modern philosophers it is meaningless to call them bourgeois. It would be difficult to find anything common in Locke, Hume, Kant, Diderot, Hegel, Bentham, Nietzsche, Bergson, Bradley, Croce, Whitehead, James, Wittgenstein, Heidegger .... Most of them did not concern themselves with what the diamat school consider the fundamental philosophical issue between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, viz., materialism versus "idealism". To suggest that these men tried to deceive the masses or to conceal the truth about economics is fantastic.

There have been fashions in philosophy, and sometimes those who were out of the fashion have found it hard to get university jobs. But there is not necessarily any sinister ruling-class influence in this. In fact the more conscious defenders of the existing order openly deplore what they consider the destructive and unsettling effects of the fashion which now monopolises the philosophy departments in the Anglo-American universities. If what Marxism says about "bourgeois" philosophy were true, Messrs. Ryle and Ayer, instead of occupying important chairs in the foremost British universities, would be breaking stones on Dartmoor.

In short, the diamats have no excuse, theoretical or practical, for bringing back "militancy", orthodoxy and the party spirit into philosophy. I hesitate to use the diamats' own methods, but I think a class analysis of this disconcerting phenomenon is plausible. The Hegelian legacy explains it in part, but the bitter rancour of Marx's attacks on his theoretical rivals also expressed the disap-



pointment of the intellectual who could not get the world to take him at his own valuation. The Marxian movement has continued to be run by discontented intellectuals, who "understand the whole historical process" (Engels) and tell the proletariat what it is expedient for them to believe and whom they must hate.

Cornforth gives another reason for identifying materialism with the working class. It is a repetition of Engels's definition of materialism as realism. Other theories, specifically "idealism", are considered to disguise things from the masses, while materialism reveals the truth. It is of course open to an adherent of any other theory to declare that his favourite doctrine alone reveals the truth to the masses; while materialism hides it.

Cornforth argues that bourgeois thought is hampered by an unexpressed imperative to defend exploitation. The facts do not support this idea. The founder of the diamat school was the son of a typical provincial bourgeois, who had a regular middle-class education at Bonn and Berlin. The specific material on exploitation with which he bolstered up his theory he derived from the reports of bourgeois government officials. Though at first neglected—like most original thinkers—his doctrines have now obtained very wide currency among bourgeois writers and teachers, and indeed exercise more influence than they deserve. It is noticeable that his theories appeal to non-specialists: his ideas on exploitation are accepted by millions of ordinary bourgeois, but by very few instructed economists, and his interpretation of history in terms of economic interests and class struggles is now almost a commonplace except among professional historians. These facts hardly suggest that bourgeois thought is dominated by an unconscious resistance to Marx's revelations.

Cornforth also argues that bourgeois thought unduly stresses the eternal and unchangeable. Again it is hard to see any truth in this. The bourgeois era has been a period of incessant intellectual change. The kind of

idealism that was orthodox, though not unchallenged, in Marx's day, has almost vanished. Millions of bourgeois are materialists (and again the most conspicuous exceptions are the professional philosophers). The typical modes of thought of the present day are relativism and positivism, the very reverse of that emphasis on the unchangeable which Cornforth claims to find.

Mannheim, arguing on quasi-Marxian lines, makes out a good case for the view that there is a specifically bourgeois mode of thought and that it is specially well suited to scientific investigation, and the enormous progress of science in the bourgeois era suggests that he is right. It may be unfair to take Soviet Russia as typical of the proletarian era, if there is to be such an era, but for the present we have no alternative except to judge by what it has done. The Soviet Government has heavily subsidised science and technology, though it has hampered them by its terror. Despite that, if the diamat were more nearly true than the bourgeois outlook, it would have been expected in these 40 years to have produced concrete proof of its superiority. Soviet science and technology have accomplished some respectable work, but nothing to suggest a new and more penetrating insight into reality. Their most advertised new departure, the work of Michurin and Lysenko, is almost certainly unsound, and the post-Stalin authorities seem to be repudiating it. If Soviet science has any advantage, it is not a superior theory, but larger funds. Alexander Weissberg-Cybulski, who has worked as a physicist in Russia, says that scientific men there do not accept diamat, and it has no influence on science, favourable or otherwise.<sup>10</sup>

There is more truth in the argument that materialism is a revolutionary doctrine. Materialism, whether mechanical or dialectical, has no logical implication for or against revolution, but materialism has some tendency to encourage revolutionary feelings. We tend to picture matter as below

<sup>10</sup> *Science and Freedom*, Secker and Warburg, 1955, pp. 224-227.

and mind above ; evolution and emergence are imagined as a process of pushing up from below ; a theory which glorifies matter and scorns mind tends to glorify the lower and scorn the upper classes in society. These are psychological realities : Haldane <sup>11</sup> points out that the same association is found in Plato and John Bunyan.

It is probable that ruling classes have noticed this association, and have therefore favoured philosophies which lay emphasis on mind or spirit, and that to this, in part, is due the disrepute which has attached to materialism in most periods of history. The same association seems to have been felt in ancient India, as is suggested by the reputed teaching of the Charvakas and the orthodox response to it. But though these considerations should make us more sympathetic towards materialists, they have no tendency whatever to imply that materialism is true.

---

---

<sup>11</sup> Haldane : *The Marxist Philosophy and the Sciences*, pp. 150-54.

idealism that was *orthodox*, though not unchallenged, in Marx's day, has almost vanished. Millions of bourgeois are materialists (and again the most conspicuous exceptions are the professional philosophers). The typical modes of thought of the present day are relativism and positivism, the very reverse of that emphasis on the unchangeable which Cornforth claims to find.

Mannheim, arguing on quasi-Marxian lines, makes out a good case for the view that there is a specifically bourgeois mode of thought and that it is specially well suited to scientific investigation, and the enormous progress of science in the bourgeois era suggests that he is right. It may be unfair to take Soviet Russia as typical of the proletarian era, if there is to be such an era, but for the present we have no alternative except to judge by what it has done. The Soviet Government has heavily subsidised science and technology, though it has hampered them by its terror. Despite that, if the diamat were more nearly true than the bourgeois outlook, it would have been expected in these 40 years to have produced concrete proof of its superiority. Soviet science and technology have accomplished some respectable work, but nothing to suggest a new and more penetrating insight into reality. Their most advertised new departure, the work of Michurin and Lysenko, is almost certainly unsound, and the post-Stalin authorities seem to be repudiating it. If Soviet science has any advantage, it is not a superior theory, but larger funds. Alexander Weissberg-Cybulski, who has worked as a physicist in Russia, says that scientific men there do not accept diamat, and it has no influence on science, favourable or otherwise.<sup>10</sup>

There is more truth in the argument that materialism is a revolutionary doctrine. Materialism, whether mechanical or dialectical, has no logical implication for or against revolution, but materialism has some tendency to encourage revolutionary feelings. We tend to picture matter as below

<sup>10</sup> *Science and Freedom*, Secker and Warburg, 1955, pp. 224-227.

and mind above ; evolution and emergence are imagined as a process of pushing up from below ; a theory which glorifies matter and scorns mind tends to glorify the lower and scorn the upper classes in society. These are psychological realities : Haldane <sup>11</sup> points out that the same association is found in Plato and John Bunyan.

It is probable that ruling classes have noticed this association, and have therefore favoured philosophies which lay emphasis on mind or spirit, and that to this, in part, is due the disrepute which has attached to materialism in most periods of history. The same association seems to have been felt in ancient India, as is suggested by the reputed teaching of the Charvakas and the orthodox response to it. But though these considerations should make us more sympathetic towards materialists, they have no tendency whatever to imply that *materialism is true*.

---

## CHAPTER XI

### ETHICS

DIAMATS attach the greatest importance to the practical implications of their theory. They proclaim a principle of the "unity of theory and practice, with practice primary"; i.e., if the two conflict, practical necessities must prevail. They ought, therefore, to be greatly concerned about the ethical implications of diamat. Actually they pay scarcely any attention to them.

This is because they follow Hegel in propounding a general philosophy which is held to have direct political implications, while the purely ethical part of the philosophy affects these political implications scarcely at all. But while this may be sound in Hegel's system it is certainly a mistake in materialism. No political theory can follow directly from a materialist philosophy. Diamat is believed to prove that the world is now undergoing an inevitable transition from capitalism to socialism; communist political theory says that it is therefore the fundamental duty of man to promote that transition. But it does not follow. Physics may prove that the world is becoming inevitably hotter; it does not follow that it is anybody's duty to make it hotter.

It can be a duty to promote the transition to socialism only if socialism is better than any of the alternative possibilities before the world. If socialism is inevitable, there is no alternative, and the question of duty does not arise. If diamats want the public to believe that something is their duty, they must admit the possibility of alternatives, and they must put forward a theory of values, of ethics, in accordance with which they can show that what they aim at is better than the other possible alternatives. Thus diamat cannot do without an ethical theory. But materialism cannot support an ethical theory.

The only ethical implication of materialism is negative.

viz., that the universe has no intrinsic value. To a materialist an attitude towards nature of awe, wonder or gratitude is irrational, and in a man or a society convinced of materialism such attitudes would probably tend to die out. "Dialectical materialism fully accepts the reality of mind and of spiritual values," says the *Textbook of Marxist Philosophy* (p. 11), but as usual the statement is dogmatic and is accompanied by no justification. Diamats doubtless see that their theory is likely to discourage the apprehension of values, and they do not want it to do so. But mere protests will not alter the fact.

A materialistic world is an unpoetical world, and apart from man it is a trivial, purposeless world. Further, it is a man-centred world. Man is the monarch of all he surveys. This attitude in individuals is disliked, and in the community or race as a whole it is equally objectionable. It is an attitude to be noticed in all modern communities, and is probably an important source of the vulgarity characteristic of modern civilisation.

I have come across no discussion of this subject by a diamat. Adherents of that theory attribute philistinism, vulgarity, etc., to bourgeois civilisation, and a disgust of these characteristics may have played some part in Marx's revolt against the bourgeois order. In the same way Lenin denounced "suburbanism". But this topic has now fallen entirely into the background, and if we can judge from Russian literature and art, communism is as philistine as capitalism itself.

Materialism has usually been adopted as an expression of hostility to religion, and religion is disliked because it obstructs science, upholds monarchical political systems, and cultivates servility. To these charges against religion it is tempting to reply *tu quoque*: the communists have also imposed their dogmas on science, have set up illiberal and inequalitarian political regimes, and have denied the masses the self-respect derived from the discussion and conduct of public affairs.

Organised religion has usually upheld the currently existing social and political order; but on the other hand most democratic and revolutionary movements have drawn inspiration from religion. The king is like God, so belief in God supports the king; but the rest of the heavenly hierarchy is no essential part of religion, and in any case it requires no great intellectual effort to realise that the king is not God, and that there is no necessary connection between the two.

On the other hand, all men are equal in the sight of God; men's bodies and minds are obviously unequal, but their souls are equal; religion tends to imply human equality. Most religions also uphold fair and merciful dealing. But materialism supplies no reason why we should look beyond the manifest inequality of men, or why men in power should refrain from taking advantage of their power. The most natural ethical attitude for a materialist is that you may do whatever you can get away with.

Religion gives some sanctity to a moral code, though doubtless the code is often defective. Non-religious but non-materialist philosophical beliefs probably tend to give some sanctity to a moral code. Materialism implies no moral code, and lends no sanctity to any code its believers may happen to respect. Many materialists have been high-minded men, but that is because they have been moved by social ideals rather than philosophical convictions. In a society in which materialism is the common belief, it probably lowers the general level of conduct, because it supplies no motive for moral effort.

Doubtless much more could be said, but it seems probable that the traditional objection to materialism on ethical grounds is justified. This does not imply that materialism is false, but it ought to make materialists uncomfortable, and demands a reply. Non-dialectical materialists usually reply, what is true, that the actual effect of abstract beliefs on conduct is slight, that materialism, though it implies no ethical system, is compatible with ethical beliefs, and that in



practice it is found that materialists are as moral as their neighbours, and sometimes more so. Diamats never rise to this level of reasonableness: their discussion of the subject is usually confined to vehement attacks on religion.

The fact is that the diamat doctrine of ethics is completely incoherent. This is because the basic attitude on the subject in the Marxian classics is drawn from Hegel, without any regard for its consistency with materialism, while Engels makes spasmodic efforts to set forth a materialist ethics, and the practical Lenin turns this jumble to the purposes of a machiavellian politics.

In Hegel's system the ethical element enters in two quite different ways. As the dialectic works itself out it arrives at the category of Objective Spirit, under which is the triad: Abstract Right, Morality, Social Ethics. Under these three moments respectively are the triads: Property, Contract, Wrong (Tort and Crime); Purpose, Intention and Well-being, Goodness and Wickedness; and the Family, Civil Society, the State. Under the last of these come four more triads concerning the family, justice, law, state forms, and so forth. Hegel's detailed treatment of ethics is confined to these few headings. It is characteristic that neither the category of Subjective Spirit, which precedes Objective Spirit, nor that of Absolute Spirit, which succeeds it, gives room for any ethical discussion.

Here in Hegel's treatment moral obligations have their place, but they occupy only a small corner of the great system. On the other hand, in a different sense the whole system is ethical, since in its application to nature and to society it manifests itself as progress. This latter doctrine is of course more important than the former, the special ethics. The grand process of cosmic evolution rolls on to its lofty destination, and the rights and wrongs, crimes, sufferings, moralities and purposes of individuals, families and states are in comparison of the slightest importance. Whether a man obeys the obligations of family, social and political morality or not has no significance: progress goes

on, not in spite of but because of his sin. Hegel is frankly contemptuous of ordinary morality, what he calls subjective morality, and the individual conscience. He places right motives no higher than true opinions. He shows more respect for social utility. McTaggart says, "He shows everywhere a strong inclination to treat ethical problems as matters for mankind, and not for this or that man."

The diamats take over this whole attitude. They believe that a principle of progress guarantees that there will come into being a social order which they do not state or prove but take for granted will be better than the existing one, that nevertheless it is man's duty to help to bring it into being, and that any suffering and wrong-doing by the way is insignificant; and they show a consistent contempt for morality. "The communists do not preach morality,"<sup>1</sup> says Marx. "For us, communism is not a condition of affairs which 'ought' to be established."<sup>2</sup> He denounced those socialists who wanted "to give socialism a 'higher, idealist tendency', or in other words to replace the materialist basis of socialism . . . with a modern mythology whose gods are Liberty, Equality and Fraternity"<sup>3</sup>. This is the contradictory doctrine, which crops up throughout diamat discussion, that socialism must be established not because it is good but because it is inevitable. It is only on Hegelian assumptions that such a statement can make sense. Marx apologised in a letter to Engels for using the expression "to acknowledge truth, justice and morality as the basis of conduct" in the Statutes of the First International.<sup>4</sup> He criticised Heinzen for discussing the problem of property in terms of "right" and "such-like simple questions of conscience and pious phrases."<sup>5</sup>

Most diamats have concluded from these and other

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Family*.

<sup>2</sup> *The German Ideology*.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Sorge, 19 October, 1877

<sup>4</sup> Letter to Engels, 4 November, 1864

<sup>5</sup> *Selected Essays*, p. 111.

such expressions, together with the fact that materialism can have no positive ethical implications, that there is no ethics in Marx's system. At the end of his book on the subject Kautsky writes: "The moral ideal is nothing else than the complex of wishes and endeavours which are called forth by the opposition to the existing state of affairs . . . thus the ideal ended continually with a disillusionment; proving itself to be an illusion after it had done its historical duty and had worked as an impulse in the destruction of the old . . . the moral ideal is a special weapon for the peculiar circumstances of the class war."<sup>6</sup> Hilferding says: "The theory of Marxism as well as its practice is free from judgements of value." Plekhanov says: "Jaures . . . talks about morality, which to use Taine's expression gives injunctions, whereas the Marxists, in what may be called their moral teaching, only try to state laws."<sup>7</sup> Stalin says: "Hence the practical activity of the party of the proletariat must not be based on the good wishes of 'outstanding individuals', not on the dictates of 'reason', 'universal morals', etc., but on the laws of development of society."<sup>8</sup> These eminent men seem never to have reflected that if Marxism is free from judgements of value, it cannot judge that socialism is better than capitalism.

Diamat also accepts Hegel's doctrine that the universe is progressing, and that the fundamental duty of man is to promote that progress. It agrees, too, with the Hegelian view that this progress is dialectical, so that a man or class who obstructs is really promoting it, because he accentuates contradiction, which is the motive-force of progress. Engels says: "According to Hegel, evil is the form in which the motive force of historical development presents itself . . . each new advance necessarily appears as a sacrilege against things hallowed . . . it is precisely the wicked passions of man—greed and lust for power—which, since

<sup>6</sup> Kautsky: *Liths and the Materialist Conception of History*, V. 3. d.

<sup>7</sup> Plekhanov: *Essays on the History of Materialism*, p. 262.

<sup>8</sup> Stalin: *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*

the emergence of class antagonisms, serve as levers of historical development."<sup>9</sup>

It was consistent for Hegel to believe in progress. He believed in a demiurge, a spiritual force which pushes progress on and ensures that it continues. Diamat is a materialism, which rules out any demiurge; consequently there can be no guarantee of progress, even if there is a criterion of it. Some diamats accept this implication of materialism. Bukharin says: "There is no teleological 'world concept' in Marx ('aims of history', 'progress', 'united humanity') . . . ." <sup>10</sup> J. D. Bernal says that diamat is no more teleological than the second law of thermodynamics: "If a social system which is involved in the internal contradictions produced by its own development changes, then it will change in general to another system which has for the moment fewer internal contradictions. In that sense and in that sense only is its future determinate."<sup>11</sup>

But the authorities are against this denial of teleology. Lenin describes Marx's theory of evolution as "a development that seemingly repeats the stages already passed, but repeats them in a different way, on a higher plane."<sup>12</sup> Engels says: "The world is to be comprehended as a complex of processes, in which in spite of all seeming accidentality and all temporary retrogression, a progressive development asserts itself in the end."<sup>13</sup> Hecker says: "Contradiction leads forward. This is the revolutionary doctrine of Hegel which was rediscovered and brilliantly applied to history by Marx and Engels."<sup>14</sup> The *Textbook of Marxist Philosophy* says: "Philosophy is the self-consciousness of a self-moving, self-directing world in a

---

<sup>9</sup> Engels: *Feuerbach*, III.

<sup>10</sup> N. Bukharin in *Marxism and Modern Thought*, p. 37.

<sup>11</sup> Bernal in *Aspects of Dialectical Materialism*, p. 115.

<sup>12</sup> Lenin: "Karl Marx".

<sup>13</sup> Engels: *Feuerbach*, IV.

<sup>14</sup> Hecker: *Moscow Dialogues*.

process of progressive development." <sup>15</sup> Stalin says : " The dialectical method holds that the process of development should be understood, not as a movement in a circle . . . . but as an onward and upward movement . . . . as a development from the simple to the complex, from the lower to the higher." <sup>16</sup> Thus despite their materialism, with which it is incompatible, the diamats do profess the doctrine of progress.

It is not fair to quote only the negative statements of Marx about ethical subjects. He did discuss, or rather make pronouncements, on ethical questions, but only in his very early works. It is interesting to look at these :

" Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the feelings of a heartless world . . . . It is the opium of the people. The people cannot be really happy until it has been deprived of illusory happiness by the abolition of religion." <sup>17</sup> This is an affirmation of the value of happiness, and perhaps of truth.

" The criticism of religion ends with the doctrine that man is the highest being for man ; it ends, that is to say, with the categorical imperative that all conditions must be revolutionised in which man is a debased, an enslaved, an abandoned, a contemptible being." <sup>18</sup> This means that man ought to be free from dependence on others and able to feel respect for himself.

" Only in the name of the general rights of society is a particular class entitled to claim universal dominion." <sup>19</sup> This is an assertion of the democratic principle of the right of the majority.

---

<sup>15</sup> *Textbook*, p. 21.

<sup>16</sup> Stalin : *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*.

<sup>17</sup> Marx : *Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right*.

<sup>18</sup> Marx, *Ibid*.

<sup>19</sup> Marx, *Ibid*.

All these are statements of Marx's views, but while compatible with materialism they are not deductions from it or dependent on it. The second passage says that the criticism, *i.e.*, abolition, of religion leads to the categorical imperative that men should be free, self-respecting, etc. It is true that some forms of religion make man dependent, and some make him contemptible. But it does not follow from the denial of religion that man is not contemptible or that he is free. The denial of religion and the truth of materialism have no bearing on either point.

In *The Holy Family* Marx makes what is, so far as I know, his only attempt to provide an ethical foundation for his socialism. Here, for once, he does not pronounce *ex cathedra*: he argues.

if materialists teach these things they are mistaken. Materialists do tend to stress the omnipotence of experience, as opposed to inborn tendencies, but there is no apparent reason why they should do so, and it is not justified empirically. Within any culture there are wide differences among individuals, which must be due in large part to inborn differences.

Some religions assert that the injustice of this life will be set right in the next. Materialism implies that this is the only life a man has, and it follows, from his point of view, that he would do well to make the best of it. But it does not follow that there is any obligation on others to help him to do so. Marx says "it is our business", i.e., we are obliged to help him to make the best of this life. No doubt there is such an obligation, but materialism as such does not imply it, though "the necessary connection of materialism with communism and socialism", and "the teaching of materialism regarding . . . the right to enjoyment" suggest that Marx thought that materialism does imply it. Materialism does not teach the right to enjoyment: materialism cannot teach anything about rights. Most materialists solve this problem by accepting the obligation of justice and the right of enjoyment, etc., as premisses independent of their materialism. But Marx apparently does not do this, and as a good Hegelian monist he cannot.

Marx uses the phrases: "have truly human experiences", and "experience himself to be a human being". If "human" means the kind of experiences humans actually have—and in materialism it can mean nothing else—it is ethically empty; for men have both good and bad experiences. If it means freedom to develop human potentialities, "his own true individuality",<sup>20</sup> it is better, perhaps, but still not free from difficulties, since men undoubtedly have bad potentialities as well as good. It is clear

---

<sup>20</sup> *The Holy Family*.

that when using these expressions Marx had in mind the Hegelian doctrine of the Notion or essence of humanity. This idea recurs frequently in diamat thinking: "As a whole a thing is characterised by a certain basic, single quality."<sup>21</sup> As applied to organisms it has a certain validity, but one which, as has been argued above, cannot easily be reconciled with materialism. In short, the effect of the word "human" in this passage is to introduce another concealed ethical premiss.

"Self-interest, rightly understood, is the basic principle of morality," says Marx. This involves as one of its consequences that self-sacrifice can never be ethically imperative. Self-sacrifice may have been unduly glorified by traditional morality, but that it is never a duty is highly paradoxical. It is sometimes right for the people of the present generation to sacrifice themselves for future generations—as communists in practice insist very strongly. Here there can be no self-interest, but there is undoubtedly an obligation. Self-interest, therefore, cannot provide an adequate basis for morality.

"If man is social by nature, he can only develop his true nature in society, and we must measure the power of his nature, not by the power of the isolated individual, but by the power of society." This is an obscure sentence. It would make better sense if for "power" we were to write "value". Even so, it would be a typically socialist overstatement. There is value in society over and above the value of the individuals, but that does not imply that there is no value in the individuals. However, Marx presumably meant "power", and the statement has a distinctly totalitarian ring. Why, in that context, talk about power at all?

Altogether, this attempt to derive communism from materialism and to lay down an ethical foundation for communism is unimpressive.

---

<sup>21</sup> *Textbook of Marxist Philosophy*, p. 299.



Marx argues in the passage just quoted that duty derives from personal interest. Similarly he says: "The communists do not preach morality . . . but they alone have discovered that what have been called 'general interests' in the whole course of history have really been the extension of the 'private interests' of particular men."<sup>22</sup> Communists argue that in order to "make sure that the private interests of the individual shall coincide with the general human interest" it is necessary to abolish private property; but as a good deal of experience assures us, the problem is not so easily solved. Moreover, communists themselves are well aware that private interests and general interests do not coincide: they "do not preach morality", but they ask the workers, peasants, etc., to sacrifice themselves for the revolution, and some diamats state it as a general duty: "The understander of Marxian dialectic must needs take his place in the struggle for the proletarian revolution,"<sup>23</sup> says Bernal. Prof. H. Levy says: "Having made the prediction we must proceed to verify it, to make it come true, to work out the theory in practice."<sup>24</sup> This is an unconditional imperative: there is no derivation of the duty from the individual interest here.

Because of this assumption that the individual and the general interest coincide, diamats have never thought it necessary to discuss the problem of political obligation. To them it goes without saying that if the state is (or claims to be) the state of the proletariat, every proletarian, and indeed every member of every other class, owes unconditional loyalty to it. In fact they believe that everybody everywhere owes unconditional loyalty to the Russian state, because it claims to be proletarian or the embodiment of the revolution. Stalin says: "A revolutionary is a man who without any reservation, unconditionally, frankly and honestly . . . is prepared to defend and fight for the

<sup>22</sup> *The Holy Family*.

<sup>23</sup> J. D. Bernal in *Aspects of Dialectical Materialism*, p. 120.

<sup>24</sup> H. Levy: *A Philosophy for a Modern Man*, p. 271.

education, and on conventional behaviour of all kinds, e.g., in dress, and to deny patriotic obligations.

This account also applies to sex morals. The coercive sex codes of the past were believed to be wholly due to oppression by privileged classes or by the privileged male sex. The abolition of classes will emancipate women, and all moral restraint will cease to be necessary: "...free sexual intercourse or .... indifference to property .... can be the highly moral product of a healthy social organism which requires for its social needs neither property in a particular woman nor that in particular means of production."<sup>27</sup> On these grounds some British communists in the 1920s believed that D. H. Lawrence was a potential supporter of communism.

In practice the early Marxists adhered to conventional morality in most matters. They professed special scorn for the sanctity of property, but Marx himself brought an accusation against Bakunin of having accepted an advance of 800 rubles from a publisher and then failing to fulfil his part of the bargain. Such conduct, he declared, besmirched the good name of the Socialist International, and required that Bakunin be expelled. When before World War I the Bolsheviks acquired funds by forgery, contracting fake marriages with heiresses, and robbery, sometimes accompanied by murder,<sup>28</sup> there was much protest in the International. Doubtless this was partly on tactical grounds, but probably many thought it was wrong.

The socialist movement never attacked truth, though Marxism has later been used to support a sophisticated theory on the matter. The socialist parties, being in opposition, were probably more truthful than their opponents. The Bolsheviks were the conspicuous exception: Lenin

<sup>27</sup> Kautsky: *Ethics and the Materialist Conception of History*, V. 5. c.

<sup>28</sup> For details see R. D. Wolfe: *Three who Made a Revolution*, ch. XXII.

early established a reputation for unscrupulous tactics in his struggle against rival socialist parties.

In regard to sex, the Marxists were earnest folk, little attracted to bohemianism, but they considered it a duty to protest against the coercive sex code upheld by the bourgeois state, and did so by refraining from registering their marriages. Among the Bolsheviks this refusal to register marriages was almost obligatory. A few members, such as Kollontay, concerned themselves specially with the sex question and actively canvassed the extreme anarchic doctrine; but most members appear to have been more interested in politics.

These were the views and practices of parties, some large, some small, but all in some degree elites. When the Bolsheviks took power in 1917 their opinions tended to become the standards of a national society, and it was soon realised that such standards would not do. After some years of experiment discipline was brought back into education. Later patriotism began to be taught. The best known controversy concerned sex. The largely theoretical bohemianism of the party had been adopted in practice by the younger generation in the cities, and Lenin was provoked to express his disapproval. Gradually restraints were applied, at least for the ordinary citizen and the lower cadres of the party. But for the higher levels in the party and society much of the old sexual anarchy remains and is winked at. While instituting rewards for mothers of large families, forbidding abortion and virtually banning contraception, Stalin continued to protest in private that communists are not puritans.

A similar double standard prevails in intellectual matters. All are compelled to study and profess diamat, and in most departments of intellectual life the orthodox theory, *i.e.*, in practice propaganda for the current line, prevails over truth. But scientific men whose work is of direct economic or military importance are allowed to pursue the truth.

The double standard also prevails in politics. While children are taught the normal duties of truthfulness, kindness, etc., the "class enemy" is specifically excepted: towards him hate is a duty and anything is allowed. In politics communists retain the right, always claimed by Lenin, to break any law. They have given the doctrine of *raison d'état* a wider interpretation than any other modern government, and aided by the dictatorship, the iron curtain, and the geography of their country, they have practised deception and violence on a far greater scale than has ever been attempted elsewhere.

Marx argued that modern liberty arose as a consequence of the freedom to trade established by capitalist business. It seems to follow that socialism would endanger individual liberty, but before 1917 the Marxian school seem never to have realised this. They sincerely believed in liberty, and held that socialism would increase and widen it. The contrast between their beliefs and the truth was made strikingly evident in the 1920s in Germany and Russia. In Germany the chief party in the ruling coalition was the Marxian Social-Democratic Party, who made no effort to introduce economic socialism but were able to implement their other beliefs. As a result a quite uncommon degree of liberty prevailed under the Weimar Republic, and Germany experienced a great cultural flowering. In Russia a Marxist party of similar beliefs held power, but it was a minority government, and it introduced socialism. In consequence popular liberties were greatly restricted from the start, and as the regime consolidated itself and socialism was established, liberty diminished still further, until in the next decade Russia became completely totalitarian.

In regard to the ethics of revolution, Mahatma Gandhi, Arthur Koestler and Kingsley Martin, among others, have accused the diamats of confusing ends and means, *i.e.*, of using bad means to good ends. The diamats have no difficulty in replying that everybody uses bad means to good ends. Mahatma Gandhi, the most absolute moralist among public men in our time, admitted that he sometimes

did so, as for example when he used the railway or the motorcar to help him in his political campaigning: in his view the use of these mechanisms is an evil, if a minor one. Clearly the diamat reply is right.

The diamats' argument is that social evolution is an organic process, the course of which is unique and is known to them in advance; society is now in the stage of transition from capitalism to socialism, a stage therefore in which the evils inherent in capitalism are accentuated to a high degree; the only way to pass to socialism is by revolution; socialism when established will be better than capitalism even at its best; it is therefore everybody's duty to help this transition, and to endure the evils incidental to it.

If the premisses of the argument are sound the conclusion may follow, but the premisses are unsound. There is no reason to believe that social evolution is organic; there are various ways by which societies can change from one phase to another; sometimes revolutions happen, sometimes not. There is no reason to believe that revolution is necessary to reach socialism from capitalism. More than that, if revolution is necessary for that purpose, then it is better to preserve capitalism. For on the evidence the socialist revolution would be exorbitantly costly, even if it produced its promised benefits. The kind of gain it promises is to abolish the occasional unemployment of some millions of workers, but in order to achieve this, it slaughters tens of millions, and condemns tens of millions more to slavery. The bargain is not worth while. Moreover, except a few, the promised benefits have not yet materialised. These benefits are achievable, on the whole, just as well under capitalism and the free democratic system.

The objection to the procedure of the diamats, then, is not merely that it adopts evil means for good ends: everybody does that. That objection is that it adopts means which are quite monstrous in their evil, to achieve a purpose of doubtful or at best moderate goodness.

---

## CHAPTER XII

### LOGIC

AN important problem of traditional philosophy is the relation of the empirical and the rational elements in knowledge. Rationalists stressed the fact that in logic and mathematics pure thought achieves a great deal without making use of empirical fact. The more extreme empiricists argued that the ultimate principles of logic and mathematics are generalisations from experience.

Engels took the extreme empiricist position: "It is not at all true that in pure mathematics the mind deals only with its own creations and imaginations. The concepts of number and figure have not been derived from any source other than the world of reality. The ten fingers on which men learnt to count . . . are anything but a free creation of the mind . . . Like all other sciences, mathematics arose out of the *needs* of men: from the measurement of land (etc.) . . . pure mathematics was subsequently *applied* to the world, although it is borrowed from this same world and represents only one part of its forms of interconnection—and it is only *just because of this* that it can be applied at all."<sup>1</sup> This has remained the orthodox view. The *Textbook of Marxist Philosophy* says: "Dialectical thinking is strictly empirical . . . it is wholly on the side of the nominalists and against Plato."<sup>2</sup> More specifically: "The sensed and the logical, direct perception and apperception, are not different, independent aspects of social knowledge, but distinct stages of it. The difference between them is relative. Direct perception becomes knowledge permeated by past experience, that is to say apperception: sensed knowledge becomes logical knowledge."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Engels: *Anti-Duhring*, I, III.

<sup>2</sup> *Textbook*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

It is no doubt true in the historical sense that induction arose from the habit of acting in accordance with experienced regularities. But it does not follow that empirical generalisation can be justified in a purely empirical way. Most philosophers agree that in order to justify empirical generalisation it is necessary to assume a principle of induction which cannot be proved. Russell in *Human Knowledge, Its Scope and Limits* sets forth five principles as the minimum which have to be assumed. No diamat seems to have discussed this question. The word of Engels is enough.

In a similar way, it is true historically that mathematics arose out of practical experiences such as measuring and counting. But it does not follow that the validity of mathematics is merely that of an inductive generalisation. On consideration it is clear that the two are quite different. The validity of mathematics is self-guaranteed and absolute, whereas an induction can always have exceptions.

The mistake is similar to the diamat error in epistemology mentioned above (Ch. 3). Diamats assume that all we need to know is how the material process of perception works: there is no logically prior problem of the validity of the knowing process. In the same way here, they assume that when we have discovered how primitive men actually began to reason mathematically, there is no further problem of the validity of mathematical reasoning. "We know of only one science, the science of history." Diamats are monists and materialists, and their materialism inclines them to favour practical efficacy as the only criterion of validity. They seem to feel that the existence of any other criterion of validity would be a violation of monism, and therefore of materialism, and they tend to denounce the assertion of the need for any other criterion of validity as "idealism". According to Hook, Marx obtained this idea from Feuerbach: "The truths of reason do not exist in and for themselves. To believe that they do is a view which might well be called supernaturalism in logic. Logical truths are the results of the concrete

nature and activities of man . . . . It is man who thinks, not the Self, or Reason." <sup>4</sup>

Actually F. P. Ramsey, following Wittgenstein, invented an argument which appears to solve this problem in a way which dispenses with real universals and is compatible with materialism. He showed that mathematical and logical propositions can be regarded as tautologies, and thus as making no addition to knowledge but merely sorting out the implications of what is known. This explains satisfactorily how the empirical and rational elements combine in knowledge: it is not necessary to assume, as Engels does, that mathematics must have been derived by induction from experience in order to explain how it can apply to experienced fact. The *diamats* however have ignored this help from "bourgeois" philosophy.

They prefer to do so, no doubt, because they wish to be able to deny the validity of logic, whereas on the Wittgenstein-Ramsey theory logic, though empty, is absolutely valid. Marxists seem to have at the back of their minds the feeling that the supposedly static character of logic makes it conservative, and its supposed rigidity makes it an ally, and therefore a product, of class oppression. The dialectic, on the other hand, which in Marx's words is "a scandal and abomination to the bourgeoisie", is better suited to a class which desires change and to the supposedly libertarian regime of the proletariat. The dialectical principle of the *Unity of Opposites* states that things are internally contradictory, and though on the face of it this merely means that they are the seat of opposing forces, it is sometimes taken to mean contradictory in the logical sense. "Dialectics is the teaching how opposites can be identical," said Lenin. Logic however maintains that a formal contradiction is impossible. Hence *diamats* criticise logic.

"So long as we consider things as at rest and lifeless,

<sup>4</sup> Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*, 90. in *Book: From Hegel to Marx*, pp. 258-261.



each one by itself, alongside and after each other, we do not run up against any contradictions in them. . . . Inside the limits of this sphere of observation we can get along on the basis of the usual metaphysical mode of thought. But the position is quite different as soon as we consider things in their motion, their change, their life, their reciprocal influence on one another. Then we immediately become involved in contradictions. Motion itself is a contradiction: even simple mechanical change of position can only come about through a body being at one and the same moment of time both at one place and in another place, being in one and the same place and also not in it."<sup>5</sup>

"Dialectical logic differs from the old formal logic in so far as the latter pretends to be 'pure' reasoning constructed from abstract elements of the thinking process. Dialectical logic on the contrary consists in a rational grasp of the actual moving and changing world in its entirety—in its concrete relations—and it thus recognises the contradictory elements which reveal themselves in actual being."<sup>6</sup>

"All this vast series of problems, recently brought forward by the development of the exact sciences, can no longer be contained within the one-sided, immobile, rational categories of the old logic, the laws of which are only significant in definite and limited conditions."<sup>7</sup>

This attack on logic has been supported by a number of fallacies, mostly quite elementary. Thus propositions which are verbally identical may be true at one time and place and false at another. Many words are imprecise: Plekhanov challenged a logician to say at what point a man who is losing his hair becomes bald. John Strachey wrote: "From the standpoint of formal logic it is nonsense to say, as Freud does, that a man both knows a thing and

<sup>5</sup> Engels: *Anti-Dühring*, I, XII.

<sup>6</sup> Hecker: *Moscow Dialogues*.

<sup>7</sup> Bukharin in *Marxism and Modern Thought*, p. 27.

does not know it . . . . in establishing these facts he (Freud) drove a coach and four through such first principles of formal logic as that of the exclusion of contradictions."<sup>8</sup> Clearly "know" has two senses: know consciously and know unconsciously.

Lenin wrote: "To begin with the simplest, most ordinary, commonest, etc., proposition, any proposition one pleases: the leaves of a tree are green; John is a man; Fido is a dog, etc. Here already we have dialectics: the singular is the general . . . . Consequently, opposites (the singular as opposed to the general) are identical . . . ."<sup>9</sup> The fact that there are natural kinds of things in the world creates a difficulty for materialism metaphysically, as I have argued above, but logically there is no difficulty. A is a dog means A resembles B, C, D . . . ., which all resemble each other so closely that we call them by a common name, dog. There is no "contradiction".

Apart from a quibble about going bald, Plekhanov bases his defence of the dialectic entirely on the supposed logical inconsistency, mentioned by Engels, in motion. Logicians claim to have solved this ancient problem by showing that there is no inconsistency in supposing that a body may occupy a place at an instant and yet not occupy it for a finite time and so be at rest there. This assumes that an instant can be defined by Whitehead's method of extensive abstraction in such a way that it is different from a finite interval; and this in turn assumes the possibility of infinite numbers, which are believed to have been proved free from contradiction. Thus motion is not self-contradictory.

The main argument of the *diamats* against logic however is that of the passages quoted above from Hecker and Bukharin: that logic is static and incapable of deal-

<sup>8</sup> Strachey in Preface to Osborne: *Marx and Freud*.

<sup>9</sup> Lenin: Notes on Dialectics.

ing with change. There is no foundation whatever for this idea. In dealing with change inductive generalisation is always necessary, but once by generalisation a law is established, logic is used, in principle, in applying it. If the situation at a certain time is given, and the law is given, then the situation at a certain other time will be determined: if the premises are true and the law is valid, the conclusion follows logically and must be true. Logic is thus necessary in dealing with change; it is often not mentioned, but it must not be violated. Logic is not responsible for material errors, i.e., mistakes of observation, omission to notice relevant facts, errors in formulating the law, etc., which may bring it about that the conclusion is not verified.

Logic makes no material assertions. It is entirely hypothetical. It is concerned only to deduce from given assumptions, the material truth or falsity of which is not its concern. Its own propositions are empty or tautologous. It is therefore a complete mistake to suppose that logic is restrictive, narrow, one-sided or static. On the contrary, it leaves open more possibilities than are realised in fact, and only empirical knowledge can select from these possibilities. Given however many facts about the world up to a certain time, logic alone can say nothing whatever about the world after that time. To say anything about the world after that time, we must have laws connecting events at different times, and such laws must be empirical. For all logic can say, any empirical law may at any moment cease to apply and any law whatever, or no law at all, may come into operation. It is the very contrary of the truth that logic is static.

The *Textbook of Marxist Philosophy* adds another argument: it declares that logic denies emergence. "A rationalist may try to make out that nature shows a smooth, continuous progression from simple to complex . . . . Nature is not continuous but discontinuous. In reality there is novelty and therefore gaps between the old and the new. If by reason itself one means precisely continuity and un-

changeability, then nature is irrational. Dialectics however challenges this conception of reason and moulds thought to the changing surface of events. In other words it gives us a conception of reason derived from the living nature of reality, not from a man-made static logic.... There would be no riddle but for static thinking. Dialectical thought allows the concept of matter to change from one evolutionary level to another. At one level matter is mindless, at the next it is minded." <sup>10</sup>

Some attempt was made above (Ch. 4) to argue against emergence, but the argument did not cite as a premiss the principles of formal logic. It was based on (admittedly inconclusive) grounds of an empirical character, chiefly the principle of dimensions. Logic has nothing to say against emergence. It is a matter to be decided purely on empirical grounds. The argument of the *Textbook* is wholly mistaken.

The diamat view that logic is static and incapable of dealing with change is entirely baseless, and derives from a misunderstanding of the nature of logic.

Logic however does say that its principles are true. Diamats say that the Law of Contradiction is sometimes violated. But this contention cannot be maintained. It is easy to show that if a proposition can, in the same sense and at the same time, be true and false, then any proposition whatever can be proved. That is to say, language collapses. If we consider facts, not words, we find that in apparent instances of contradiction alternative hypotheses are always possible. None of the new hypotheses to which Bukharin refers involves any logical contradiction. If an electron is now supposed to pass through a potential barrier which was formerly believed to be impenetrable, there is no logical contradiction, but merely a more exact law in place of a less exact one.

---

<sup>10</sup> *Textbook of Marxist Philosophy*, p. 10.

Some logicians have tried abandoning the Law of the Excluded Middle. But this is not comparable to the diamats' rejection of the Law of Contradiction. In rejecting the Excluded Middle, the emphasis is on verifiability. They will not commit themselves, for example, to the assertion that a mathematical proposition is either true or false until there exists a procedure for proving or disproving it. Meanwhile presumably it remains in a third category: neither true nor false but meaningless. Even this is grave enough in its implications: it renders certain important parts of mathematics theoretically invalid. But this is far less serious than denying the Law of Contradiction, which renders all discourse invalid.

The treatment of logic by diamat, then, is all errors. It declares that logical principles are empirical generalisations, that they are rigid, narrow, restrictive, incapable of dealing with change, etc., and that the most important of them, the Law of Contradiction, is false. All these contentions are certainly mistaken.

---

## CHAPTER XIII

### HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

It is the general opinion that Marx's greatest contribution to theory was the Materialist Conception of History, or *Historical Materialism*. This is usually interpreted in a broad way to mean an emphasis, in social studies, on the effects of the economic background, and of economic and technical changes, and on class interests and conflicts. Though not originally due to Marx, these ideas were much reinforced by his work, and they are doubtless valuable guides. They do not, however, constitute Historical Materialism in the strict sense.

Marx's clearest statement of the theory is that given in the Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*. "In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of the material forces of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society—the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production in material life determines the social, political and intellectual life processes in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come into conflict with the existing relations of production, or—what is but a legal expression for the same thing—with the property relations within which they have been at work before. From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such

transformations a distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic—in short ideological—forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so we cannot judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained rather from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social forces of production and the relations of production . . . . In broad outline we can designate the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal and the modern bourgeois modes of production as so many epochs in the progress of the economic formation of society."

Lenin does not say that this doctrine is logically implied by materialism: he only calls it an extension of materialism. But since it bears the name, and is a highly important doctrine, it should be noticed. Large books have been written on this subject, but here only a few points will be made.

Diamat admits the emergence of mind, and indeed claims to explain it. It also accepts mind as creative. There is therefore no reason why diamat should be anxious to deny the creativity of mind in history; and in fact in some contexts it emphasises the creativity of mind. Lenin refers to "the living tree of living, fertile, genuine, powerful, omnipotent, objective, absolute human knowledge".<sup>1</sup> Yet Marx says, and Lenin repeats, that "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but their social being that determines their consciousness".

How, then, does the "development of the material forces of production" proceed? Marx explains it thus:

---

<sup>1</sup> Lenin: Notes on Dialectics.

"Morality, religion, metaphysics, and ideology in general, with their appropriate forms of consciousness, thus forfeit the semblance of independence. They have no history, no evolution, of their own. Human beings, developing material production and material intercourse, and thus altering the real world that environs them, alter therewith their own thought and the products of their thought. Consciousness does not determine life, but life determines consciousness."<sup>2</sup> Marx thus admits that thought about economics and technology and material concerns alters the material world. This is how the material forces of production develop. But he proceeds immediately to add that these changes in the material world "alter their own thought and the products of their thought. Consciousness does not determine life." The implication is that all thought, including thought about technology, etc., "forfeits the semblance of independence." The whole process of economic and social evolution is regarded as automatic, foreordained. This is hard to reconcile with the creativity of mind.

It is common for technological inventions to remain unused for long periods, because the general state of technology or of the public mind is such that they cannot be adopted. In that case the inventor's social being has not determined his consciousness. Every instance of thought which does not serve an immediate practical purpose is a refutation of Marx's doctrine.

There have been intellectual movements or forces which cannot be attributed to the forces of production, but have produced important historical effects. An example is the rediscovery in Europe of the literature of classical Greece at the Renaissance. Another instance is the Darwinian doctrine of biological evolution. These cannot be ascribed to the forces of production, but they had profound effects. Such events clearly contradict Marx's theory.

In the same way the theory denies that ideological fac-

<sup>2</sup> Marx: *German Ideology*.



tors can have economic effects: the causal connection must be the other way. Yet consider the Hindu and Muslim communities in the present century. The differences between them obviously are caused by the religious difference, that is by an ideological difference. But among the effects of this ideological difference are important economic differences: Muslims (in undivided India) controlled probably their full share of commerce, but less than their due proportion of technical training, and scarcely any industry or finance. A similar though less extreme difference is to be observed between Protestants and Catholics in Europe. More extreme cases are the differences between Gujaratis and Maharashtrians in Bombay, between Marwadis and Bengalis in Calcutta, between Indians and Burmese in Burma, and between Chinese and Malays in Malaya. All are ideological differences which cause important economic differences.

According to the theory, technological and economic changes cannot be due to political events: the causal sequence must be the other way. Yet it is obvious that politics constantly affect economics. Marx's formulation indeed says so: when the material forces of production come into conflict with the existing relations of production and are fettered by them, that means that politics fetters economies. Engels also emphasises the fact. Yet if it is so, a main pillar of the theory collapses.

Towards the end of his life, in an oft-quoted letter, Engels qualified Historical Materialism. That the "economic facts are the only determining cause in life," he says, is "a meaningless, abstract and absurd phrase". But then he proceeds: "The economic situation is the *basis*, but the varied elements of the superstructure—constitutions, legal forms, and above all the reflections of the real struggle in men's brains, that is, political, legal and philosophical theories—also exercise their influence upon the course of historical struggles and in many cases predominantly determine the forms which these struggles take.... But it is the *economic movement* which finally forces its

way through all this multitude of fortuitous occurrences . . . . " <sup>3</sup> The first part of this statement says that elements other than the economic are also causal factors, though the economic remains the principal one. This is a definite denial of what Marx said, and is also not easy to understand. If these independent causes are causes, it cannot be assumed that the economic cause always predominates, if, indeed, that expression can be given any meaning. Either the economic factor is one among others, or it is the only one. The second part of the statement, however, cancels this admission, and goes back to the original doctrine.

Diamats will at least maintain that the great revolutions are due to the "economic movement", *i.e.*, to changes in the forces of production. It ought to be possible, then, to point to the particular change in the forces of production which was the root cause of any of the great revolutions of history. This however proves not to be so easy.

No important change in the forces of production caused the change from the economic system of the Roman Empire to the feudalism which prevailed when the dust had settled after its downfall. Stalin attributes it to economic causes, <sup>4</sup> but the attempt is unconvincing. Obviously it was mainly a political or military change, brought about by the invasions from the east. In fact Marx says that the only difference between the Roman and the feudal economic systems was in the status of labour; this is a difference in the relations, not in the forces, of production.

It is possible to give an account of the Great Rebellion under Cromwell in England in terms of the broader and vaguer version of Historical Materialism mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, but the events cannot be made to conform to Marx's doctrine as set forth in the Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*. Charles I did not up-

<sup>3</sup> Engels to Joseph Weydemeyer, 21-2-1892.

<sup>4</sup> Stalin: *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*.

hold obsolete relations of production which were fettering the changing forces of production: the dispute, so far as it was not about religion, turned upon the authority of the king or of parliament to levy taxes for the admittedly necessary purposes of building a navy and so forth. Doubtless the king would, if he had succeeded, have established an absolute monarchy on the French model. We do not know if this would have fettered the forces of production, but it is unlikely, since the French monarchy encouraged them.

The French Revolution 150 years later is still more difficult for the defenders of Historical Materialism. In England the bourgeoisie were on the revolutionary side, at least in the earlier phases of the struggle. In France, the bourgeoisie supported the monarchy, which encouraged economic progress, and were opposed to the revolution. Labriola says: "The revolution ensued from the obstacles which the bourgeoisie had to overcome by violence, since it appeared from evidence that the passage from the old forms to the new forms of production—or of property, if we borrow the language of jurists—could not be realised by the quieter way of successive and gradual reforms."<sup>5</sup> This is the formula, but it has no correspondence with the facts. The new industry had made very little progress in France by 1789, but the monarchical state was encouraging it. The causes of the revolution were, in fact, to an overwhelming extent ideological.

The American Revolution has some resemblance to the Cromwellian rebellion, and perhaps conforms better to the diamat formula, since the British government did in a general way obstruct the development of American industry. But this was a minor issue; the main question was the political or ideological one of taxation without representation. The revolt was brought to a head when the British rescinded a number of duties on imports into Ame-

---

<sup>5</sup> Labriola: *Essays on the Materialist Conception of History* (Kerr edn.), p. 171.

The diamat doctrine is that religion is due to class division, and is adopted by the lower classes as a solace in their misery, and by the upper classes as a "false consciousness" to justify their indefensible privileges. Marx was relatively tolerant, but Lenin always condemned religion with the greatest vehemence. "Every religious idea, every idea of god, even every flirtation with the idea of god, is unutterable vileness . . . contagion of the most abominable kind."<sup>8</sup> In theory the Bolsheviks favoured tolerance of religious beliefs, except among party members, but in fact, in keeping with Lenin's attitude, the Soviet state at first vigorously persecuted all forms of religion. This policy was maintained, with minor fluctuations, for nearly 25 years; then during the Second World War the state recognised the Orthodox Church, which has since enjoyed official favour, and has conducted propaganda for the current political campaigns of the party. Other religions, however, have not been treated so well.

This change in the attitude towards the Orthodox Church in 1941 was due mainly to the fact that a large proportion of the Russian people had retained their religious beliefs, despite 25 years of persecution and propaganda against religion. This fact, however, is susceptible of easy explanation in terms of the diamat theory, which asserts that religion among the lower classes is due to misery and oppression.

So far as I know, none of the diamat classics discusses religion seriously, except as a tactical problem. Engels criticises Feuerbach and Dühring for being insufficiently hostile to religion. Lenin makes atheism a philosophical premiss from which he argues to the falsity of the doctrines of Mach and Avenarius.<sup>9</sup> Hecker follows this example: "N. M. Pokrovsky has advanced the theory that the fear of death is the creator of religion. It is characteristic of the whole organic world, not only of man . . . Freud finds

<sup>8</sup> Lenin: Letter to Gorky, 14-11-1913.

<sup>9</sup> Lenin: *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, IV, 4.

rica but retained a small duty on tea, a commodity which the Americans had no hope of producing for themselves. The most important background condition for the revolution was the defeat of the French power in Canada in 1760, which made British protection against the French no longer necessary.

A historical phenomenon of particular importance from the point of view of Historical Materialism is religion. It is part of the social superstructure, and ought therefore to be determined by the forces and relations of production.

No change in the forces or relations of production appears to have been responsible for the momentous conversion of Europe to Christianity. No change in the forces or relations of production led to the unification of Arabia and the rise of Islam.<sup>6</sup> Calvinism is described by Engels as the "natural religious garb of the interests of the bourgeois".<sup>7</sup> If this is so it is strange that the Italian and Portuguese bourgeoisie, the pioneers of European capitalism, never showed the slightest inclination towards Calvinism. Doubtless there is some connection between capitalism and Protestantism, though what that connection is has been disputed by learned historians. The point made here is that the fact mentioned, that the Italian and Portuguese bourgeoisie did not embrace Protestantism, shows that the Historical Materialist formula is not adequate.

If the rise of Christianity and of Protestantism defies explanation in these simple terms, their decline in recent generations contravenes the theory even more definitely: the principal cause of the loss of belief in Christianity is manifestly ideological. It is due to the rise and spread of science.

<sup>6</sup> Marx said to Engels that the destruction of Arabian trade by war was "one of the chief factors in the Mohanunadan revolution" (letter of Engels to Marx, 6-6-1853). Thus war, not an economic change, was the cause.

<sup>7</sup> Engels: *Feuerbach*, p. 68.

The diamat doctrine is that religion is due to class division, and is adopted by the lower classes as a solace in their misery, and by the upper classes as a "false consciousness" to justify their indefensible privileges. Marx was relatively tolerant, but Lenin always condemned religion with the greatest vehemence. "Every religious idea, every idea of god, even every flirtation with the idea of god, is unutterable vileness . . . contagion of the most abominable kind."<sup>8</sup> In theory the Bolsheviks favoured tolerance of religious beliefs, except among party members, but in fact, in keeping with Lenin's attitude, the Soviet state at first vigorously persecuted all forms of religion. This policy was maintained, with minor fluctuations, for nearly 25 years; then during the Second World War the state recognised the Orthodox Church, which has since enjoyed official favour, and has conducted propaganda for the current political campaigns of the party. Other religions, however, have not been treated so well.

This change in the attitude towards the Orthodox Church in 1941 was due mainly to the fact that a large proportion of the Russian people had retained their religious beliefs, despite 25 years of persecution and propaganda against religion. This fact, however, is susceptible of easy explanation in terms of the diamat theory, which asserts that religion among the lower classes is due to misery and oppression.

So far as I know, none of the diamat classics discusses religion seriously, except as a tactical problem. Engels criticises Feuerbach and Dühring for being insufficiently hostile to religion. Lenin makes atheism a philosophical premiss from which he argues to the falsity of the doctrines of Mach and Avenarius.<sup>9</sup> Hecker follows this example: "N. M. Pokrovsky has advanced the theory that the fear of death is the creator of religion. It is characteristic of the whole organic world, not only of man . . . Freud finds

<sup>8</sup> Lenin: Letter to Gorky, 14-11-1913.

<sup>9</sup> Lenin: *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, IV, 4.

the origin of religion in the instincts of reproduction and the associated impulses of destruction and violence . . . . We reject these biological theories, though on the surface they seem materialistic. Essentially they are idealistic, since they trace religion not to the psychology of society, but to the psychology of individuals and their biological peculiarities. In the final analysis this leads to the view that religion is inherent in nature and to the acceptance of a spiritual principle existing independently of the social environment. In short, you may call such a view a proof of the existence of God."<sup>10</sup>

This is a good instance of the diamats' practice of arguing from final causes. They deny Pokrovsky's and Freud's views, not on evidence, but because these views imply an unwelcome conclusion, *viz.*, that religion may prove more difficult to get rid of than was otherwise believed. Diamat of course denies that direct theological argument has any meaning. Here it goes beyond that and maintains that psychological arguments about the cause of religious beliefs have no meaning. Neither arguments about God nor arguments about the causes of belief in God concern what they purport to concern: what such arguments really concern is the class struggle, and they are to be decided, not on the grounds usually held relevant, but on their significance in relation to the class struggle. "We know of but one science, the science of history."

With such an approach, it is scarcely surprising that the diamat theory about religion is unsatisfactory.

An analogous social phenomenon about which the Historical Materialists have had curiously little to say is nationalism. All of them however appear to agree with Stalin's statements that the nation is a historical category belonging to the epoch of rising capitalism, and that the cause of the rise of the nation in that epoch is the search

---

<sup>10</sup> Hecker: *Moscow Dialogues*. -

of the young bourgeoisie for markets.<sup>11</sup> These generalisations are of doubtful validity. Radhakumud Mookerji has shown that substantially all that distinguishes a nation and constitutes national consciousness existed in India before the Christian era.

However, as with religion, so with nationalism, the concern of the diamats is political and tactical, and their tactics have followed closely parallel courses in the two cases. From the time of the *Communist Manifesto* it was accepted doctrine that Marxists were opposed to nationalism, as to religion, and discussion on tactics envisaged little more than variations in emphasis on this opposition. Lenin went further than most in allying himself with the nationalism of oppressed people, and this alliance was emphatically tactical. Stalin followed him in his book, which appeared in 1913. The national movement, he says, is "in its essence always a bourgeois struggle, one that is mainly to the advantage and profit of the bourgeoisie.... the workers are interested in the complete amalgamation of all their fellows in a single international army...."<sup>12</sup>

In relation to the Russian empire, this is the policy that Lenin and Stalin followed. They gave tactical support to the nationalism of the oppressed nationalities in order to win them over to their side in the civil war, and they succeeded in most cases in preventing these nationalities from breaking away. Then in the name of proletarian solidarity and socialism they imposed on these nationalities a highly centralised political regime, somewhat tempered by cultural nationalism. This cultural nationalism is however qualified, and is accompanied by the opposite policy of racial and national fusion, which is evidently intended eventually to achieve "the complete amalgamation" of all the peoples of the Soviet territory "in a single international army". Though on different grounds, several nationalities have already been abolished.

<sup>11</sup> Stalin: *Marxism and the National Question*, II.

<sup>12</sup> Stalin: *Ibid.*, II.



In relation to the outer world, Lenin hesitantly and Stalin vigorously encouraged Russian nationalism. At first they discouraged the nationalism of other independent countries, but in the later 1930s, shortly before he recognised the Orthodox Church, Stalin changed his attitude towards nationalism. Since then the communist parties have adopted and have tried to monopolise nationalism, claiming that theirs is the most sincere, if not the only genuine, nationalism, though in practical politics they subordinate it to Russian nationalism.

Thus the approach of the Historical Materialists to nationalism has been almost purely practical and tactical. The theory has if anything less to say on the subject than it has on religion. Its failure to deal with this very important historical phenomenon is a striking and notorious weakness of the Historical Materialist theory.

The Historical Materialist doctrine of the state, as usually presented, is that it is an instrument of class dictatorship and coercion. "The state, which is organised violence, inevitably came into being at a definite stage in the development of society, when society had split into irreconcilable classes, and when it could not exist without an 'authority' ostensibly standing above society and to a certain degree separate from society. Arising out of class contradictions, the state becomes 'the state of the most powerful class'...." <sup>13</sup> Lenin here begins a quotation from Engels's *Origin of the Family*. This is the view of the state that Lenin always takes. Marx also said exactly the same thing, as in the *Communist Manifesto*.

Engels takes this view in *The Origin of the Family*. But in *Anti-Duhring* he expresses a different opinion. "Society divides into classes: the privileged and the dispossessed, the exploiters and the exploited, the rulers and the ruled: and the state, which the primitive groups of communities

---

<sup>13</sup> Lenin: "Karl Marx", encyclopaedia article.

of the same tribe had at first arrived at only in order to safeguard their common interests (e.g., irrigation in the East) and for protection against external enemies, from this stage onward acquired just as much the function of maintaining by force the conditions of existence and domination of the ruling class against the subject class."<sup>14</sup> He develops the same idea at greater length later.<sup>15</sup>

It seems at first sight easy to reconcile Engels's two doctrines by a slight change of nomenclature. What in *The Origin of the Family* he calls "the old gentile institutions", which the primitive tribe "had at first arrived at only in order to safeguard their common interests", are in *Anti-Duhring* called the state. Many institutions have changed their functions in course of time: why not this? But the difference between the two theories is actually of great importance.

If at one stage of history a state can be formed in the absence of a propertied class and for common purposes, such as irrigation and defence, then in other historical periods states may exist in the absence of a propertied class. This seems perfectly commonplace to the non-diamat, who accepts it that the state exists for common purposes and is on the whole a beneficial institution. But this is not the view of the diamat, who holds that the "essence" of the state is coercion, and that it must therefore be got rid of, and that the way to abolish it is to abolish the propertied class, that is to abolish property. But if the state can exist in the absence of a propertied class and of property, this method may fail, and despite the abolition of property he may be left for an indefinite future with an essentially coercive institution on his hands.

K. A. Wittfogel has pointed out<sup>16</sup> that almost up to the Revolution Lenin freely discussed and approved the

<sup>14</sup> Engels: *Anti-Duhring*, II, I.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, II, IV.

<sup>16</sup> *Freedom First*, February, 1935.

Marxian view that in Asia in early times a purely bureaucratic state existed, whose principal function was the operation of irrigation works. This is the type of state known in the Marxian literature as Oriental or Asiatic. It is distinguished from other types of state by the fact that the ruling class is not a group of property-owners but a purely functional class. No such state is known to have existed in Europe, and in the Marxian view the European state was from the first a class state, set up by property owners to protect their property. The Asian state is that mentioned in *Anti-Duhring*: the European (and American) state is that of *The Origin of the Family*.

Thus *Anti-Duhring* implies that a propertyless bureaucracy can set up a state and become the ruling class. Wittfogel suggests that this disturbing possibility occurred to Lenin about the time of the Revolution, and explains why thereafter he never referred to the Oriental or Asiatic stage of evolution, but only to the state as the organ of the dominant propertied class. But silence is no answer: the bureaucracy that he set up in Russia has become a ruling class, and carries on its "essential" function of coercion long after the abolition of property. The theory of Engels and Lenin is that after the abolition of property the state should "wither away". But the implication of *Anti-Duhring* is that this need not happen, and that the Soviet bureaucracy is capable of maining its essentially coercive state indefinitely.

The *Anti-Duhring* theory also implies that society has taken different lines of development in Europe and in Asia. This must be an unpalatable idea for Mao Tse-tung, for he bases his policy on the doctrines of the class struggle, the class state, the dictatorship of the proletariat and the withering away of the state, whereas according to this implication of *Anti-Duhring* these doctrines do not apply in Asia.

The non-diamat will probably recall the celebrated passage in Gibbon about the deadly dispute between Homoiouision and Homocousion. Indeed the diamat theory that

the state is essentially the organ of a propertied class and is essentially coercive is scholastic; though it is maintained for tactical as much as theoretical reasons. But Engels's two theories and the difference between them raise an interesting question. Marx appears to have thought that Asian societies are inherently immobile. He refers frequently to the stagnant or stationary character of Indian society: "India's social condition has remained unaltered since its remotest antiquity".<sup>17</sup> On the other hand he certainly thought that European society is inherently progressive, and that the stages he mentioned in the passage quoted from the *Critique of Political Economy* (except the Asiatic) must succeed one another by an organic necessity. Stalin says: "Five main types of relations of production are known to history: primitive communal, slave, feudal, capitalist and socialist."<sup>18</sup> The enumeration is now orthodox. Stalin clearly regards the transition from each of these stages to its successor as inevitable, though his detailed explanation of the transition is far from convincing. In general terms he says: "That in life which is born and grows day after day is invincible, its progress cannot be checked.... if, for example, the proletariat as a class is born and grows day after day, no matter how weak it may be today, in the long run it must conquer.... On the other hand, that in life which grows old and is advancing to its grave must inevitably sustain defeat.... if, for example, the ground is slipping further and further back from under the feet of the bourgeoisie..... it must in the long run sustain defeat."<sup>19</sup> This naive argument shows the organic character which diámatists attribute to social change.

Marx regularly used organic analogies, and as Cornforth approvingly notes, he took the idea from Hegel.<sup>20</sup> "No social order," says Marx, "ever disappears before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have

<sup>17</sup> *New York Daily Tribune*, 25-6-1853.

<sup>18</sup> Stalin: *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*.

<sup>19</sup> Stalin: *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> M. Cornforth: *Dialectical Materialism*, p. 60.

way it is achieved, will depend on political traditions, the rigidity of class differences, and so forth.

If we consider the historical evidence, it is doubtful if there is any general rule that a slave economy will change into a serf economy and a feudal political system. It is equally doubtful if there is a general rule that a feudal or similar system will change towards a capitalist system. There have in history been many communities organised in a ways broadly similar to feudalism, and in many of them a merchant class has existed. But only in some of the countries of western Europe has this system changed spontaneously towards one in which the merchants have been dominant. Even where merchants and manufacturing capitalists are dominant it does not seem to be inevitable that a scientific technology should arise. In India in the Moghul period the merchant class was prosperous and influential, though it seems never to have entertained any ambition for political power. But there was no indication of the beginnings of scientific technology. Indian culture was such that intellectual effort was not exerted in that direction, as it was in Europe, where two centuries of active scientific progress, most of it without any practical application, preceded the industrial revolution.

It may be concluded that the organic evolutionary schema laid down by the diamats is not a general law, though some of its stages happen to have applied to some human communities. Culture is far more variable than this theory suggests, and the schema does not apply at all to the greater part of mankind. Even where it applies up to a certain point, divergencies occur after that point. Within the Eur-American culture it applies better to some countries than to others. Where capitalist industrialism has been fully established, divergencies still occur, and some countries tend towards socialism and some do not, or do so only partially and in various ways. In fact we have up to the present no instance in which a community has passed through all the stages laid down in the law, for it is admitted that Russia, and still more clearly China, were forced

been developed ; and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions for their existence have matured in the womb of the old society."<sup>21</sup> Perhaps the clearest statement of historical teleology is Engels's : "In case a Napoleon is lacking, somebody else will take his place. This is proved by the fact that each time the man was found as soon as the need arose : recall Caesar, Augustus, Cromwell."<sup>22</sup> This is even more naive than Stalin. Innumerable human needs have arisen and, alas, no man has been found.

Human communities are not organisms ; but as they consist of organisms who entertain purposes, and moreover do so in ways subject to statistical regularities, it is possible that the behaviour of communities is at least quasi-organic and therefore quasi-teleological. This argument is advanced by H. Levy.<sup>23</sup>

In a given cultural climate, men's purposes are partially stereotyped and therefore partially predictable. For a given community or a group of culturally similar communities it may be practicable to formulate a law of social evolution. In particular, in modern Eur-America, where material needs are both dominant and variable, communities are likely to take a course of development broadly similar to that laid down by the diamats. The technology of such a community is likely to be progressive, and as supplies increase there will be a tendency for the system of distribution to change in the direction of equality. However, no close approximation to equality can be expected unless a scientific technology develops, and whether science develops must depend primarily on intellectual factors. Even if a scientific technology has developed, there are other cultural factors to take into account. The degree of equality attained, and the

<sup>21</sup> Marx : *Critique of Political Economy*, Preface.

<sup>22</sup> Engels : Letter to Starkenburg, 25-1-1894.

<sup>23</sup> H. Levy : *A Philosophy for a Modern Man*, p. 271.

way it is achieved, will depend on political traditions, the rigidity of class differences, and so forth.

If we consider the historical evidence, it is doubtful if *there is any general rule that a slave economy will change into a serf economy and a feudal political system.* It is equally doubtful if there is a general rule that a feudal or similar system will change towards a capitalist system. There have in history been many communities organised in a ways broadly similar to feudalism, and in many of them a merchant class has existed. But only in some of the countries of western Europe has this system changed spontaneously towards one in which the merchants have been dominant. Even where merchants and manufacturing capitalists are dominant it does not seem to be inevitable that a scientific technology should arise. In India in the Moghul period the merchant class was prosperous and influential, though it seems never to have entertained any ambition for political power. But there was no indication of the beginnings of scientific technology. Indian culture was such that intellectual effort was not exerted in that direction, as it was in Europe, where two centuries of active scientific progress, most of it without any practical application, preceded the industrial revolution.

It may be concluded that the organic evolutionary schema laid down by the diamats is not a general law, though some of its stages happen to have applied to some human communities. Culture is far more variable than this theory suggests, and the schema does not apply at all to the greater part of mankind. Even where it applies up to a certain point, divergencies occur after that point. Within the Eur-American culture it applies better to some countries than to others. Where capitalist industrialism has been fully established, divergencies still occur, and some countries tend towards socialism and some do not, or do so only partially and in various ways. In fact we have up to the present *no instance in which a community has passed through all the stages laid down in the law*, for it is admitted that Russia, and still more clearly China, were forced

into the socialist stage before it was due. The post-Marxian diamat doctrine of a uniform law of social evolution is completely mistaken, and has only seemed reasonable because diamats have almost confined their attention to the culturally similar societies of Eur-America, and because within this culture the socialist movement has imposed a partial uniformity of political development which would not otherwise have occurred. Indeed that movement is trying, with some success, to impose its historical schema on the whole world. But its success is obviously no measure of its theoretical truth, which is all we are concerned with here.

Diamat however is committed to historical teleology, to "tendencies working with iron necessity towards inevitable results",<sup>24</sup> by which Marx evidently meant uniform results. Even he, however, had to admit that this applied only to Europe. There were, in his view, no "tendencies" in Asia, and no "results", until Europeans introduced them, for Asia had been "stagnant since its remotest antiquity."

How did he combine these two contradictory ideas? The answer is, I think, that there were two Marxs. One was a Hegelian, who, apparently without realising it, continued to believe in all the main doctrines of his master; the other was a shrewd and realistic social analyst. This is the difference between the two versions of Historical Materialism. The broader, vaguer doctrine, which is better called a method, is scientific, and is the version Marx actually used in his often brilliant historical and political writing, including his writing on Asia. The more specific version, that set forth in the preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*, is Hegelian, and is incredible.

Even if Historical Materialism were true, it would not follow that diamat is true; and even though Historical Materialism is false, that fact does not disprove diamat. But the founders of these doctrines expended their greatest

---

<sup>24</sup> Marx: *Capital*, I.



*intellectual effort on Historical Materialism, and merely threw off the more general theory of diamat as a complement to it. If then Historical Materialism is a mistake, it is surely unlikely that the broader, more ambitious diamat, to which they gave less attention, should by a lucky chance prove to be the truth on all the vexed problems of philosophy.*

---

## CHAPTER XIV

### PUTTING HEGEL ON HIS FEET

IN Part II I have drawn attention to some of the errors made by diamats in pursuance of their doctrine of "party philosophy", and in ethics, logic and historical materialism. It may be argued, however, that these are errors of fallible individuals and not of the diamat doctrine as such.

Most diamats adhere firmly to the doctrine of party philosophy, but if it be admitted that they are mistaken, the other main principles of diamat may still be upheld. Indeed, as has often been pointed out, the theory of party philosophy is itself inconsistent, since it claims simultaneously to be both merely relative and absolutely true. It is also not easy to render party philosophy, which is a theory of knowledge, a *pramana*, consistent with the *pramanas* set forth in other expositions. According to the theory of party philosophy, only the proletariat, or persons from other classes who devote themselves to practical revolutionary work in the cause of the proletariat, can attain to philosophical truth, whereas according to other expositions, truth is to be obtained by observation, induction, the formation of hypotheses and their testing in practical life. Clearly these *pramanas* are of very different characters, and their compatibility one with the other is far from obvious.

Can diamat be considered tenable, then, if freed from party philosophy? It is certainly freed from an untenable incubus, and therefore is so much the easier to believe. But it ceases to be the communist philosophy: it would be condemned by all communists as social-democratic. Its theory of knowledge would then coincide with that of traditional materialism: it would, so far, not be "dialectical".

The logical errors mentioned in Chapter 12 seem still less an integral part of diamat. It should, apparently, be easy to drop them, and in fact there is some indication that diamats are becoming aware of the untenable character of

these ideas.<sup>1</sup> But if they discard their objections to logic, they will find it difficult to give the dialectic the important place in their theory which it now occupies. Instead of a superior logic, valid *a priori*, dialectic will become merely an empirical generalisation, and once more diamat collapses into traditional materialism.

The ethical errors arise principally from the attempt to deduce the ethical system from the diamat. Diamat conceives nature as evolving in a direction which is known, and is known to be beneficial; and the fundamental duty of man is to co-operate with or promote this evolutionary process. This deduction of ethics from metaphysics breaks down at every point, because the implications of materialism and of the dialectical evolutionary schema are incompatible. It would be possible to frame an ethical system which would be plausible in itself and compatible with materialism. But this would be the procedure of traditional materialism. Diamat has the ambition of monism, and in particular desires to deduce its ethics from its metaphysics; but its attempt must break down, because it is impossible to deduce any ethics from materialism.

Finally, we have seen that historical materialism is valuable if formulated in a non-dogmatic way as a methodological principle; but if, as in some statements of Marx, it claims to be a comprehensive historical schema of a dialectical type, and to trace all historical changes to a single causal factor, then it is entirely untenable.

Thus the errors of diamat which have been mentioned in Part II are not imported into it by the fault of particular fallible expositors, but are integral to it, and all arise from one source. That source is the attempt to "put Hegel upon his feet", *i.e.*, to transform the system of Hegel into a materialism while retaining a great many doctrines which make sense only in a system which is rationalistic and teleological and therefore incompatible with materialism.

<sup>1</sup> See Cornforth: *Theory of Knowledge*, pp. 61-65.

## CHAPTER XV

### HEGEL AND MARX

HEGEL's dialectic is the mode of self-development of the Idea, which is the Spirit, the Demiurge of nature, from a logically primitive state called Being through a large number of steps to a consummation in the Absolute Idea or Spirit. The process is logical, not temporal: all the steps are valid simultaneously. This is true at least in the earlier, properly logical part, and even in that of Nature, in which Hegel denied evolution. His History, however, seems to involve a progress in time.

corresponds in its turn to a triad : (a) the Logic proper, to Being, Essence, the Notion ; (b) to Mechanics, Physics, Organics ; (c) to Subjective Spirit, Objective Spirit, Absolute Spirit. Each of these moments is in its turn a triad, and these are further subdivided, and so on. Hegel gives about 90 triads, and permits the reader to add to their number. Nevertheless the whole process is a unity. Each triad subserves the whole : the same Idea is at work through them all. It is conceived as comprehending the whole universe in its whole development. The universe thus has a unity of the type called organic : Hegel avowed himself a follower of Aristotle. The process is also logical. All the transitions are represented as strictly deduced. In the Nature and History the situation is grasped under one concept, which in ordinary language would be called its essence, and this undergoes the transformation. That the universe at any time can be summed up in an essence again shows its unity.

As the process is logical, it is in principle knowable *a priori*, and Hegel supposed himself to be working it out without regard to empirical facts. This is certainly true of the Logic proper ; in regard to Nature and Spirit it is controversial. Hegel also claimed that the procedure gave absolute certainty. He regarded the dialectic as a method superior to ordinary deduction and induction, of which it is in some sense a synthesis. Deduction and induction are characteristic of an inferior type of thought, *Verstand*, understanding, while dialectic is possible only to a superior mode of thought, *Vernunft*, reason.

What did Hegel think of the validity of logic ? *Prima facie* the system implies the impossibility of logical contradiction, since it is the contradiction between thesis and anti-thesis which drives the process on to the synthesis. Yet some claim that Hegel's originality and importance lie in his demonstration that contradictories are compatible. Identity in difference is the formula. On the other hand, contradiction may be the result of the lower, imperfect type of thought, the understanding, implied in the use of the

## CHAPTER XV

### HEGEL AND MARX

HEGEL's dialectic is the mode of self-development of the Idea, which is the Spirit, the Demiurge of nature, from a logically primitive state called Being through a large number of steps to a consummation in the Absolute Idea or Spirit. The process is logical, not temporal: all the steps are valid simultaneously. This is true at least in the earlier, properly logical part, and even in that of Nature, in which Hegel denied evolution. His History, however, seems to involve a progress in time.

Each step of the process is triple: thesis, antithesis, synthesis (in a few cases there are two or four steps). The triad is more than a mere positive, negative, synthesis. It also partakes of the nature of genus, differentia, species, and of immediacy, mediacy, and the overcoming of mediacy by a new immediacy, or as it is expressed: in itself, for or over against itself, and in and for itself. Similarly it is universal, particular, singular, and it is also called abstract, dialectical and speculative. These emphasise the logical nature of the transitions, and the progress which they effect towards concreteness. The second term, although a differentiation of the first, is also regarded as its opposite or negative, but at the same time as identical with it. The greatest stress is laid on the unity or identity of opposites. However, the antithesis is not in general the logical contradictory of the thesis: in many instances it is not at all clear how it can be called its opposite. The triad schema, further, is not uniform. It follows a somewhat different pattern according to the stage, Being, Essence or Notion, in which it occurs. There is a progressive decrease in the importance of the movement from contrary to contrary.

The whole process is one triad: (a) The Idea in Itself, the Logical Idea; (b) The Idea out of Itself, Nature; (c) The Idea in and for Itself, Spirit. Each of these moments

corresponds in its turn to a triad: (a) the Logic proper, to Being, Essence, the Notion; (b) to Mechanics, Physics, Organics; (c) to Subjective Spirit, Objective Spirit, Absolute Spirit. Each of these moments is in its turn a triad, and these are further subdivided, and so on. Hegel gives about 90 triads, and permits the reader to add to their number. Nevertheless the whole process is a unity. Each triad subserves the whole: the same Idea is at work through them all. It is conceived as comprehending the whole universe in its whole development. The universe thus has a unity of the type called organic: Hegel avowed himself a follower of Aristotle. The process is also logical. All the transitions are represented as strictly deduced. In the Nature and History the situation is grasped under one concept, which in ordinary language would be called its essence, and this undergoes the transformation. That the universe at any time can be summed up in an essence again shows its unity.

As the process is logical, it is in principle knowable *a priori*, and Hegel supposed himself to be working it out without regard to empirical facts. This is certainly true of the Logic proper; in regard to Nature and Spirit it is controversial. Hegel also claimed that the procedure gave absolute certainty. He regarded the dialectic as a method superior to ordinary deduction and induction, of which it is in some sense a synthesis. Deduction and induction are characteristic of an inferior type of thought, *Verstand*, understanding, while dialectic is possible only to a superior mode of thought, *Vernunft*, reason.

What did Hegel think of the validity of logic? *Prima facie* the system implies the impossibility of logical contradiction, since it is the contradiction between thesis and anti-thesis which drives the process on to the synthesis. Yet some claim that Hegel's originality and importance lie in his demonstration that contradictories are compatible. Identity in difference is the formula. On the other hand, contradiction may be the result of the lower, imperfect type of thought, the understanding, implied in the use of the

categories, and may be removed by rising to the higher point of view of the reason. McTaggart takes this view. Certainly there can remain no contradiction in the Absolute Idea. It is not clear whether Hegel held strict logical contradiction to be possible

The whole process is considered progressive in the sense of a movement towards the "higher", a conception which can be taken as involving ethical improvement, though Hegel described it as consisting in increasing concreteness.

In his early and long unpublished writings, Marx took the view that Hegel's dialectic is in some respects valid, but is vitiated by his idealism. He therefore adapted it to materialism, "stood it upon its feet instead of upon its head", or extracted the "rational kernel" from the "wrappings of mystification". Marx's own words, in a Preface to *Capital*, that he proclaimed himself a disciple and "even . . . toyed with the use of Hegelian terminology" out of contempt for mediocrities who treated Hegel as a "dead dog", do not suggest that he really took it very seriously. However, other remarks suggest the contrary. He says that his dialectical method is both the "direct opposite" and "fundamentally different" from Hegel's. It is opposite in that it is materialistic: how otherwise is it different?

Hegel's dialectic is closely bound up with his idealism. Its very *raison d'être* was to maintain his idealistic view that the universe can be deduced from a logical principle, Reason. Ordinary logic, which can get no more out of its premisses than they contain, would not suffice, so he invented or adopted the concrete universal, which contains its own particular and singular, and the dialectical logic, which purports to show that all the necessary universals imply each other and are ultimately identical. The dialectic was required in particular to reconcile the One and the Many, and the Infinite and the Finite, that is the Absolute and the World. Hegel held that these high purposes needed a superior method of thought. Induction and deduction



cannot give certainty: even deduction requires initial assumptions. Dialectic, by proving the mutual dependence of all its categories, avoids making an unsupported assumption of any of them, and thus secures complete certainty.

Materialism needs the dialectic for none of these purposes. It denies that the universe can be deduced. It does not need to maintain that the universe is one, except in the sense that it is all material. It has no knowledge of the Infinite, which is a theological category. It ought to be, but in fact never is, worried by the problem of the one and the many, *i.e.*, the problem of universals. It can put up with any number of brute facts. All materialists except Marx have been content with induction and deduction, and have not aspired to a higher mode of thought.

To state the differences between the dialectic in its Hegelian form and materialism more precisely: 1. The mode of change of a material world in time is usually assumed to be causal. The mode of development, timeless or time-like, of the dialectic is logical. The triads proceed in terms of negation, synthesis, mediation, particularisation, concreteness, and the like. It would be difficult to translate these into causal terms.

2. There is in the Hegelian dialectical schema only one process, which embraces the whole universe. There is no room for *casual heterogeneity, irreducible complexity, or diverging lines of development*. All must be subject to one formula and constitute one thing. This is at least not the picture of the world presented by common-sense materialism.

3. The dialectic, in dealing with any situation or process, must impute to it an essence, a category whose changes rule the changes of the process. This may seem to be similar to the procedure of science—which is assumed to be compatible with materialism—in abstracting from the *data those which are useful for its purpose*. The conception of essence, however, is different from this. Essence assumes

not a causal series of events but a drive, an urge, presupposing a goal, which is aimed at and may be reached in spite of the recalcitrance of minor factors. Further, this essence is not relative to the purposes of an investigator, but is absolute. Or perhaps rather, it is relative to the purpose of the universe, which is absolute. Such a conception is incompatible with materialism, for which nothing is more important or fundamental or essential than anything else.

4. In Hegel's dialectic, each synthesis is higher than its moments: there is progress at every step, and this is inherent in the dialectic. A universal progressive tendency is incompatible with materialism.

5. Hegel's dialectic is progressive or teleological not only in the sense of his "immanent teleology": it is the progress of a conscious process, the Idea realising itself.

6. The Hegelian dialectic assumes an organic universe.

All these features of Hegel's dialectic seem clearly inconsistent with materialism, and yet Marx's dialectic, despite its supposed fundamental difference from Hegel's, retains them all.

1. The diamats accept causality. But at the same time they accept dialectical laws, which are logical, not causal; and the two are incompatible. Engels gives as one of the three dialectical laws which he considers important the law of the negation of the negation. Marx also refers to it. This law states that after a finite interval of time, a state of things will occur which will resemble the initial state of things in certain respects, while the intermediate stage will not resemble it in those respects. Now causal laws cannot say this kind of thing except with regard to organisms or effectively isolated systems. Causal laws are differential with respect to time: they can state only tendencies at an instant, and it will depend on circumstances what will be the result of integration over a finite interval.

That is the effective difference between a causal and a logical law.

Diamats might attempt to escape from the difficulty in three ways :

(a) The triad law might be explained as due to chance. Any object or situation will have various characters, A, B, etc. Now everything changes, and the changes in this case will be by change of A to A', B to B', etc. Some of the determinables of which A, B, etc., are determinates may have finite ranges of variation. Then by the ordinary principle of chance A is almost bound to occur again. It may occur again even if the range of variation of the As is infinite. But when A occurs again, B will be B', C will be C'', etc. This is the original situation, but changed, and if we are so inclined we can call it "higher". It will be perfectly clear that this is not what is meant by the triad law.

(b) The triad law might be explained by chance in another way. The outcome of causal processes after finite intervals of time might happen in some cases to coincide with the results of triad laws. This will not do if the triad law is to be universal. But then it will be open to another objection : if there are two logically independent laws giving the same results we have to decide which is valid. Positivists need not do so ; they are concerned only with observable results. But materialists must decide, and presumably they will have to decide that the causal law is the valid one. In that case the triad law is merely a happy accident and no law at all.

(c) It might be attempted to show that causal laws necessarily lead to results in accordance with triad laws. Bernal<sup>1</sup> tries to do this in regard to some physical and chemical laws, by appealing to a general tendency to the

<sup>1</sup> In *Aspects of Dialectical Materialism*, p. 101.

accumulation of residual effects, side-products, etc., which eventually reverse the direction of change. Engels tries to show, in the case of some of the economic laws formulated by Marx, that causes of the usual type bring about the negation of the negation. Bernal admits that his triad laws apply only in special circumstances. If, for example, in a chemical case the side-products are removed by washing or precipitation, the triadic character of the process disappears. Only if it is the logical equivalent of a causal law or set of laws of a certain range of application, within which it is therefore as valid as the causal law, can a triad law be considered a genuine and important law; and in view of the difference in character between causal and logical laws, this is unlikely ever to be the case.

Laws of the triadic form do not, then, apply systematically except perhaps to organisms. By retaining this type of law diamat shows that it has not made good its claim to emancipate itself from Hegel.

2. Diamat also retains the Hegelian doctrine that the universe is one single process. Recall Marx's dictum: "We know but one single science, the science of history.... As long as men shall exist the history of nature and the history of man will condition each other.... Ideology itself is but one of the aspects of this history."<sup>2</sup> Engels refers to the dialectic as "the universal laws of motion, as well of the outer world as of the thought of man".<sup>3</sup> Lenin describes it as "the interdependence of all concepts without exception, the transition of all concepts into one another without exception, the unity of opposites between the concepts".<sup>4</sup> The *Textbook* rubs it in: "... the relatively external and the relatively internal are interwoven, condition each other, and create a vital connection of everything with everything in the unitary flow of the development of mat-

<sup>2</sup> Marx: *The German Ideology*.

<sup>3</sup> Engels: *Feuerbach*, p. 95.

<sup>4</sup> Lenin: *Notes on Dialectics*.

ter".<sup>5</sup> "Social history as a whole, consisting as it does of the successive replacements of one social system by another, . . . forms a single nodal line of measurements."<sup>6</sup> " . . . no nodal line exists independently of the others. In essence everything in the world is the nodal line of its own internal differences, and at the same time one of the measurements in some wider nodal line."<sup>7</sup> "Philosophy is the self-consciousness of a self-moving, self-directing world in a process of progressive development."<sup>8</sup> " . . . there emerges one and only one solution . . . we see the appearance of one line of development "<sup>9</sup>. " . . . in a concrete situation it is important to find *that* 'new thing' which emerges as *the* progressive step . . . "<sup>10</sup> "The Leninist policy is the conducting of a single line through all stages of revolutionary conflict." <sup>11</sup>

3. The attribution of an essence to every thing or process is often to be noticed in *diamat* discussion. The word is of course a favourite one, as are others of similar purport: fundamental, basic, central, in the last instance, and the like. The doctrine of basis and superstructure occurs to mind. The essence of the social process is the change of the productive forces: ideological phenomena are "ultimately" or "nothing but" defences of class interests. Capitalism is thought of in *diamat* as definable by a formula, which shows strictly what is and what is not compatible with capitalism and thus what innovations do and what do not necessitate revolution. Classes are spoken of similarly as if their nature were adequately given by a formula. "Proletariat and wealth are opposites. . . . What we are concerned with is, what the proletariat actually is; and what the proletariat will, in accordance with the nature

<sup>5</sup> *Textbook*, p. 260.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 353.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 351.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 379.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.

of its own being, be historically compelled to do. Its goal and its historical action are obvious, are irrevocably indicated, in the vital situation of the proletariat." <sup>12</sup> *The Textbook* again puts it very frankly: "As a whole a thing is characterised by a certain basic, single quality." <sup>13</sup> "By what objective criteria can we tell which properties are essential? The closer their connection, and at the same time the more acute their opposition, so much the more essential and characteristic are their mutual relations.... The most essential character of capitalists is to exploit; of cats to catch mice; of an acid to combine with an alkali or metal.... the most essential qualities are those which a thing manifests in relation to its 'other', to its opposite." <sup>14</sup> "But all this many-sidedness and relativity of the trade unions does not mean that what they really are is purely a question of the 'point of view', so that they can be just as truly regarded in several different ways.... the unitary, qualitatively unique definiteness of the trade unions .... is to be a school of communism." <sup>15</sup>

This conception of essence is appropriate in a philosophy in which logical categories are the governing principle of things, but quite out of place in a materialism. Once more diamat has not emancipated itself from Hegel.

4. A number of statements are quoted above (Chapter 11) from the classical diamat authors to show that they believe in the doctrine of an inevitable progress. It is unnecessary to repeat that while natural and consistent in Hegel, this belief is incongruous in materialism.

5. In Hegel the dialectical process is the work of the Idea striving for self-realisation. Prof. Sidney Hook remarks that there is a "thread of consciousness" running through

<sup>12</sup> Marx • *The Holy Family*.

<sup>13</sup> *Textbook*, p. 299.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 272.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.

the discussion. Odd as it may seem, one sometimes gets this idea in reading the *diamats* too. Marx wrote of Bacon, evidently with approval, that he "thought of motion as the first and chief intrinsic character of matter, not only mechanical or mathematical motion, but motion as an urge, as a living spirit, as tension, as 'suffering', to use the language of Jacob Boehme."<sup>16</sup> Lenin's *Notes on Dialectics* give the same feeling: "The condition for the knowledge of all processes of the world in their '*self-movement*', in their spontaneous development, in their real life, is the knowledge of them as a unity of opposites . . . . Development is the '*struggle*' of opposites. . . . In the first conception of motion, *self-movement*, its *driving-force*, its source, its motive, remains in the shade. . . . The first conception is lifeless, poor and dry. The second is vital. . . ." Again: "(8) The development of the thing or of the phenomenon, its own movement, its own life. . . . (15) The struggle of content with form and *vice versa*. The throwing off of the form, transformation of the content."

6. These points can be summed up in the statement that Hegel's universe was an organism. The *diamat* universe retains clear traces of an organic character. Labriola said, "Ours is the organic conception of history."<sup>17</sup> Bernal says: "It is just as true and significant that the processes in the universe have a natural division into a hierarchy of qualitatively different organisations as that the whole forms an organic unity."<sup>18</sup> Marx habitually used organic analogies in discussing social development: the new society develops within the womb of the old. When the time arrives for the overthrow of the old system, the forces will be ready and the necessary leader will be forthcoming. *Diamats* discuss history as conforming to a necessary pattern: almost any passage could be chosen at random. Thus: "Kant's philosophy was the abstract-theoretical expression of the strug-

<sup>16</sup> Qu. from Hecker: *Moscow Dialogues*

<sup>17</sup> Labriola: *Essays on the Materialist Conception of History*, p. 83.

<sup>18</sup> *Aspects of Dialectical Materialism*, p. 107.

gle of the German bourgeoisie at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century. Thus it was progressive at that time. But by the beginning of the 19th century, in accordance with the development of German society, the transcendental philosophy was overcome and dissolved by the highest stage of that philosophy, Hegel's system and Feuerbach's materialism. On Kant devolved the role of creator of the great ideas of German classical philosophy. Kant prepared the way for Hegel." <sup>19</sup>

In the light of such statements as these, it is hard to deny at the back of the minds of the diamat writers the idea of an organic universe pursuing a single, preordained course of development towards an ethically desirable goal. This conception of course finds constant expression in their political writing, which presupposes an irresistible trend in all countries towards communism.

It is not true, then, that Marx set Hegel on his feet or extracted the rational kernel from his system. Diamat remains Hegelianism.

---

---

<sup>19</sup> *Unter dem Banner des Marxismus.*